

Earth Kind:

Environmental Stewardship Program

Fall EK Practices:

Fall is an excellent time of the year for a variety of Earth Kind landscaping activities. Before beginning *your* fall projects, take a moment to review these suggestions to ensure that you are contributing to a healthy and sustainable landscape environment.



Take the Earth Kind Challenge:

Participating in this on-line exercise is a great way to get started. It only takes a few minutes and will assist in determining the types of changes in landscape practices that can be made to help preserve and protect the environment in which we live. See the Earth Kind web site to take the challenge.



Fall Planting:

Fall is an excellent time to establish new plants in the landscape. Cooler temperatures and occasional rainfall create ideal growth conditions for a variety of trees, shrubs, annuals and perennials. The Earth Kind Plant Selector is an excellent tool for identifying highly adapted plants for specific gardening areas throughout the state. This searchable database provides information on over 1,000 commonly used landscape plants. Those with an Earth Kind Index value of 8 or

above will significantly contribute towards creating a healthy and sustainable landscape. Visit the Earth Kind web site for more information and access to the EK Plant Selector.

Fertilization:

Fall fertilizer applications are very common and typically recommended to prepare plants for winter. The type and amount of fertilizer to apply should be based on the results of a soil test. In the absence of this information, 1–2 pounds of actual nitrogen per 1,000 sq. ft., from a no/low phosphorus fertilizer material, generally meets the needs of most plants. Fertilizer applications should be directed toward landscape beds and turf areas and away from streets, walks, drives and other hardscape areas. Remember - misapplication (not type or amount of fertilizer used) is the most frequent cause of surface and ground-water contamination.



Earth Kind uses research-proven techniques to provide maximum gardening and landscape enjoyment while preserving and protecting our environment.

The objective of Earth Kind is to combine the best of organic and traditional gardening and landscaping principles to create a new horticultural system based on real-world effectiveness and environmental responsibility.

The principal goals of Earth Kind include:

- Water conservation
- The safe use and handling of fertilizers & pesticides
- Reduction of yard wastes entering urban landfills

As your interest and knowledge in these areas grows you will have an increased awareness of the many programs, practices and activities that are Earth Kind. Working together we can make a difference in conserving and protecting our valuable natural resources.

*For more information
see our Web site:*

EarthKind.tamu.edu





Mulching:

A 2-4 inch layer of mulch is an excellent means of holding in valuable soil moisture, suppressing weed growth, moderating soil temperature and providing winter protection for tender plants. Since organic mulches break down over time, a re-application in the fall is generally required/recommended. It's usually a good idea to mulch after planting fall annuals and perennials. Mulching is a valuable Earth Kind practice that can preserve valuable natural resources and contribute to the aesthetic appearance of the landscape.

Leaf Management:

In the fall, many yards are virtually covered by leaves from deciduous trees. Disposing of these leaves can create a significant burden on landfills and municipal compost facilities. Earth Kind leaf management practices provide the opportunity to use this valuable natural resource to improve a landscape's health and appearance. Following are some leaf management options.



Mowing/Shredding:

A light covering of leaves can be mowed, simply leaving the shredded leaves in place on the lawn. This technique is most effective when a mulching mower is used. In fact, during times of light leaf drop or if there are only a few small trees in your landscape, this technique is probably the most efficient and easiest way to manage leaf accumulation.

Mulching With Leaves:

Using leaves as a mulch is a simple and effective way to recycle this organic material and improve the landscape. Leaves can be used as a mulch in vegetable gardens, flower beds and around shrubs and trees. Apply a 3 to 6 inch layer of shredded leaves around the base of trees and shrubs. In annual and perennial flower beds, a 2 to 3 inch mulch of shredded leaves is ideal. Mulches are especially beneficial when used around newly established landscape plants, greatly increasing the likelihood of their survival.

Soil Improvement:

Leaves may be collected and worked directly into garden and flower bed soils. A 6 to 8 inch layer of leaves tilled into a heavy, clay soil will improve aeration and drainage. The same amount tilled into a light, sandy soil, will improve water and nutrient holding capacity.

A recommended strategy for using leaves to improve soil in vegetable gardens and annual planting beds is to collect and work them into the soil during the fall. This allows sufficient time for the leaves to decompose prior to spring planting. Adding a little fertilizer to the soil after working in the leaves will hasten their decomposition.

Composting:

To prepare compost, organic material, microorganisms, air, water and a small amount of nitrogen are needed. Microorganisms break down the organic material. The nitrogen, air and water provide a favorable environment for the microorganisms to decompose the organic materials and make compost. Air is the only ingredient which cannot be added in excess. A lack of nitrogen to "feed" the microorganisms will greatly slow the process, while an excessive amount is wasteful and can kill the microorganisms. Too much water limits the amount of air (oxygen) available to the microorganisms, greatly inhibiting their activity. As composting occurs, heat is generated, often causing temperatures to rise to 140 degrees F.



There are numerous Fall - Earth Kind practices that can contribute to a healthy and sustainable environment. We encourage you to visit the Earth Kind web site for additional ideas on how you can assist in preserving and protecting our valuable natural resources.