



June 2002

Landscape Waste

Q _____ **Is leaf burning allowed in Illinois?**

A It depends on the local laws or ordinances that affect you. Many local governments prohibit the open burning of leaves and other types of landscape waste. There are no State laws which prohibit leaf burning; however, some restrictions do exist:

*Leaves may be burned only on the premises on which they are produced or at sites provided by and supervised by a local government.

*Local governments may prohibit the open burning of landscape waste or any other material.

*Local governments may regulate burning by specifying times and/or weather conditions during which open burning may occur.

Q _____ **May other types of vegetative waste be burned?**

A Yes, if the vegetative waste is also landscape waste. Landscape waste is defined as all accumulations of grass or shrubbery cuttings, leaves, tree limbs and other materials accumulated as the result of the care of lawns, shrubbery, vines and trees (415 ILCS 5/3.270). However, the same restrictions apply to the open burning of this type of waste as to the burning of leaves.

Q _____ **When is a tree not landscape waste?**

A With respect to when vegetative materials would not be landscape waste, that depends on whether the use of the land was changed as a result of its removal. Vegetative materials, especially trees, generated as part of pre-construction or clearing activities are by definition not agricultural or landscape waste, as they are not generated by the same type of activity as lawn maintenance. These materials are more properly categorized as trade waste. For example, if the fruit trees were cut down not for an agricultural purpose, but to ready the land for a housing subdivision, they would be trade waste. Vegetative materials that are also trade waste may be burned, if they are burned in a permitted air curtain destructor. The burning of other types of trade waste is prohibited.

Q _____ **Can burning landscape waste cause harm?**

A The open burning of leaves and grass can be of particular concern because of its impact on the public's health. Smoke from burning leaves, grass, brush, and most plants contains high concentrations of such pollutants as carbon monoxide, particulates, and photochemically reactive chemicals, some of which are known carcinogens and some that contribute to smog formation. High levels of carbon monoxide are of concern because it can bind with hemoglobin in the blood to reduce oxygen flow. This can be particularly harmful to young children and other sensitive populations. Particulate matter can become embedded in lung tissue and can be harmful to small children and individuals with respiratory disorders. The burning of leaves releases the photochemically reactive chemical, benzo(a)pyrene, a known carcinogen. Benzo(a)pyrene is a concern because it is known to cause cancer in animals and has been linked as the major factor in lung cancer caused by smoking. Additionally, the high moisture content of grass causes low burn temperatures and inefficient burning, resulting in noxious odors and incomplete combustion.



How can smoke be minimized from open burning?



To burn with reduced smoke, the fire must be hot. Dry fuel, high temperatures, and plenty of oxygen help reduce the amount of smoke generated during burning. The recommended elapsed time between cutting and burning should be 3 to 6 weeks for vegetative material smaller than 6 inches in diameter and 6 weeks for vegetative material greater than 6 inches in diameter. Stumps greater than 12 inches in diameter should be split and dried for at least 6 weeks prior to burning.



What are the alternatives to open burning?



Consider the following alternatives to the open burning of agricultural or landscape waste: chipping, shredding, mulching and composting yard waste. Composting yard waste and using leaves and grass clippings for mulch are alternatives. Composting leaves and grass clippings produces soil fertilizer through decomposition. Compost piles are simple to begin and maintain. Branches and trunks larger than 3 inches can be used for firewood.



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