

Sweep it up!

Ever wonder why your city sweeps the streets or why sometimes when it rains in the summer and fall there is flooding on your street? Lawn debris (grass clippings and leaves) stopping up the storm drains could be the cause. Cities allocate money to cleaning streets to prevent this, but in the summer and fall, it can be hard to keep on top of the problem. They need your help!

What are storm drains?

Storm drains are an important part of a city's storm drainage system. Because cities have large surfaces that do not allow water to penetrate (i.e. parking lots, roads, driveways, etc.), cities need a system to carry large amounts of water away from these areas quickly. When it rains, properly functioning storm drains collect rainwater and carry it through a series of gutters, ditches, and pipes to the nearest stream. In order to function properly, these drains need to be clear of debris.

Environmental impact

In addition to potential flooding issues, grass clippings and leaves negatively impact water quality. Lawn clippings and leaves can be transported via storm drains to local streams where they add nutrients to the water as they break down. Fall leaf litter alone can account for almost [60% of phosphorus pollution](#) for the year! These nutrients are harmful at high levels because they cause harmful algal blooms that are hazardous to humans, pets and wildlife.

What can you do?

Next time you walk your dog or amble down your street take a gander at your community storm drains. Is there debris on top of or adjacent to the drains?

Clogged up storm drains cause localized flooding events which can flood basements and damage homeowner property. Cities try to keep up with cleaning storm drains, but sometimes it's not enough. If you see debris on your storm drain, sweep it up! Take personal responsibility for your storm drain and make a difference in your neighborhood and for local wildlife.

Lawn debris, like grass clippings and leaves, is a *free* source of nutrients for your lawn. Consider using the [mulch setting on your lawn mower](#) to add these nutrients back to your lawn. Another option for use of these free nutrients is to [compost your yard waste](#) and use it in garden beds or as mulch around your landscaping.

Suggested Social Media Text

Don't let your leaves become litter!

Lawn debris, like grass clippings and leaves, is a free source of nutrients for your lawn and garden, but creates problems when left in the street.

- Lawn debris clogs storm sewers, causing *flooding*.
- Lawn debris adds NITROGEN and PHOSPHORUS to waterways, contributes to *water pollution* and promotes *harmful algal blooms*.

Do your part! Don't send it to the creek. Sweep it up! Keep it out of the street!

References and Resources

Leaf pickup research from WI– nitrogen and phosphorus

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0048969716314462?via%3Dihub>

HO-75 Home composting <http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/ho/ho75/ho75.pdf>

UKY Extension video on mulching lawn leaves

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pVTY4BhsBz4>