Doing Your Part to Manage Stormwater Runoff

Photo from leaf-blower.com: Blow leaves and other debris away from the street and not toward it. If you hire a lawn service, make sure they do the same.

Deborah Lawson is owner of Rejuvenation LLC Landscaping and Design and a Certified Master Gardener with the University of Florida IFAS Extension in Leon County, http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu/

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I love north Florida. We have rolling hills, seasons and deciduous trees that turn color and go bare for the winter, letting in more of the winter sun. It's a wonderful compromise between the more tropical parts of Florida and living in a place where you have to deal with winter ice and snow. Johnnie Mercer romanticized about the autumn leaves in his English lyrics to the famous song. But in this area the leaf drop from fall to spring isn't all that romantic, it just seems non-stop. We have leaves falling in the autumn, then more after we get freezing temperatures, and then even more in the spring as the new leaves bud out. It’s great if you live in the woods, but can be problematic if you live in an urban environment where the leaves have to go somewhere.

I’ve written before about turning those leaves to golden compost or mulch and not bagging them for the dump. This time my message stresses the harm leaves and debris cause when not disposed of properly.

Drive through newer developments and you can see their attempts to protect storm drains with bales of straw and other stop gap measures. Consider what happened south of the FSU campus as the new stadium went up. Stormwater is a serious issue with respect to flooding as well as pollution. As we continue to build, we have to provide a place for the water to go, and those stormwater fees we pay on our tax bills are being used to channel it underground to stormwater facilities and retention ponds.
What happens when the stormwater drains get clogged with trash, debris and leaf litter? The water backs up and you have yourself a FLOOD. All the advanced engineering in the world cannot prevent this malfunction. Especially when we have torrential downpours like we did last fall. Only proper management by responsible homeowners, renters and lawn maintenance personnel can really make a difference.

So what can you do? Blow or rake leaves and other debris AWAY from the street and the storm drains, NOT INTO THEM! If the leaf litter is relatively clean, use it as mulch for your shrubbery or add it to your compost. If it’s not, bag it for proper collection and disposal.

If you hire a lawn service, make sure they do the same. Make it a priority to keep the storm drains near your property clean and debris free. It’s as important as any other maintenance you do.

Of course, there are other things you can do to help with the flow of stormwater. Landscaping solutions can be an extremely important part. Consider a rain garden which provides a temporary place for water to collect. Consider limiting the amount of impervious pavement on your property, allowing more area for water absorption. Consider rain barrels which collect water from your roof and downspouts for landscape use. For more information about rain gardens, rain barrels and other stormwater solutions for Florida-friendly landscaping, visit http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu/handbook/Reduce_Stormwater_Runoff.pdf or contact the Leon County Extension Master Gardener office in Tallahassee at 606-5202.

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