

DISPOSING OF Landscape material TO REDUCE ITS Distribution into the LANDSCAPE

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Be careful with that yard waste. You may be spreading aggressive plants to areas where they don't belong.

Yard or landscape maintenance involves removal of leaves, clippings, whole plants, and unwanted potted house plants. However, these yard materials can allow some plants to establish in the disposal site given contact with soil and sufficient water. As a result, careful disposal of this material is critical so that plants unwanted in one location don't unintentionally become established elsewhere.

A disposal site may be on the edges of the property from which the material was removed, causing future maintenance and removal efforts, or it may be in a designated organic material disposal site. Designated sites are determined by your local government — some mix landscape and household wastes in a landfill, others have separate areas designated for compost. Anyone disposing of landscape wastes needs to be aware of the destination of those materials. Contact your county waste management utility or extension agent for information about local disposal sites in your area that are designated for plant waste.

Unfortunately, landscape waste materials are sometimes disposed of in accessible locations on someone else's property, either public or private. The — generally illegal — dumping has allowed several species to become established in natural areas. Discarded plants have spread into interiors of parks and other conservation areas through seed dispersal and vegetative growth. For example, wax begonia, Pothos, heavenly bamboo, Ardisia, golden bamboo, and arrowhead vine are among the species which have moved into wild areas through this mechanism. This spread of non-native species into protected sites is threatening the plant and animal species those sites were purchased to conserve.

There are several options available to dispose of this material appropriately depending on the situation and local ordinances. Living plant tissue can be destroyed on site through burning, composting in bins, or putting it in or under heavy plastic, where sunlight can rapidly cause decomposition. Information on composting can be obtained from your County Cooperative Extension Office. Material also can be dumped in designated disposal areas.

Timing of maintenance operations also can reduce the potential for plant propagation movement to undesirable sites. Plants can be pruned before fruit is mature or leaf raking can be done before seeds of surrounding plants have dropped. Awareness of how a species is likely to become established is important. You can gain valuable clues from propagation methods. For example, if a species is most likely to be propagated from cuttings (e.g. Wedelia or lantana), pruned material of that plant may take root without appropriate precautions.

FNGA requests its members to carefully dispose of unwanted plant materials, regardless of the source, to ensure that more plants are not given the opportunity to invade into natural areas. Particular care should be used when disposing of species known to be invasive, especially with those FNGA has recommended for discontinued use. Education of your customers also encourages protection of natural areas. *This article also appeared in Greenline 20(1):3 and 20(2):10.*



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Photo by Dennis Teague.