

Fall Yard Cleanup: Wait - Help Our Environment

By Toni, Habitat Ambassador Volunteer

I've adopted a new perspective on fall cleanup and love what I see... and so can you. When you throw out your 'yard waste' - you're throwing away part of our environment, including next year's pollinators.

When I look at my fall plants, instead of seeing them as dead and dying, I see environmental 'gold' - winter food, places to raise young and shelter for songbirds, butterflies and bees, the makings of topsoil and more... In nature, *nothing* goes to waste.

I made a conscious decision to leave plants that go to seed (like black-eyed susans, sunflowers, purple coneflowers) until spring as natural bird feeders, nesting materials and protection. Native grasses (like big bluestem, little bluestem) protect butterflies and beneficial insects.

It just took a gradual mental adjustment for me to wait to do yard cleanup, but the change makes a big difference in our environment. In spring, I cut plants down to 4-6 inches high to make room for new growth.

I put cuttings from plants, shrubs or trees in an out-of-sight back corner for good uses, like:

- 1) *Brush pile* to protect birds (check your regulations) www.nwf.org/Get-Outside/Outdoor-Activities/Garden-for-Wildlife/Gardening-Tips/Wildlife-Brush-Shelters.aspx,
- 2) *Compost* to create natural fertilizer www.backyardhabitat.info/PDF_Files/aCompost%20pile.pdf and
- 3) *Butterfly log cabin* (very few butterflies migrate) www.backyardhabitat.info/PDF_Files/aButterfly%20Log%20Cabin.pdf.

There are other environmentally friendly things to do in your yard in fall. See www.backyardhabitat.info/PDF_Files/Fall%20Yard%20Care%20-%20color.pdf for more information.



Goldfinch eating coneflower seed in my yard

I have an organized, purposeful yard. I maintain my yard according to the guidelines listed on the "How Do I Do This" tab.

Seed heads add winter interest and should not be unsightly. I keep leaves in the flower beds as natural mulch and to protect beneficial insects. I put up a certified sign that explains what I'm doing.

I'm continually rewarded for my new attitude by watching colorful treats in my yard, like goldfinches, chickadees, etc. feeding from the plants, a mourning cloak butterfly floating out of the butterfly log cabin on a sunny winter day and spectacular migratory warblers refueling on their journey.

Email me at naturescoop@backyardhabitat.info to receive our monthly 'Nature Scoop' email with yard tips, nature news/events and check out our Ohio website for more information at www.backyardhabitat.info.