**Compost, Mulch, or Bag Autumn Leaves as They Fall!**

It’s that time of year when the weather is cooling off and the leaves are dropping from trees. To protect our water quality, we need to deal with the leaves as soon as possible. It’s important to compost, mulch or rake and bag the leaves before they end up in the gutter and block the storm drains. Especially if the weather has a wet-dry-wet-dry pattern, the leaves create a solid mat or mass over the storm drains and severely or completely block the flow of stormwater. If this happens to a storm drain by your home, grab a rake and clear the leaves and debris away!

Also, dry leaves on the ground absorb all kinds of pollution, such as pesticides, fertilizers, and bacteria from pet waste, and if they blow into the street, they absorb oils and other leaking auto fluids, Additionally, the leaves themselves carry a supply of nitrogen and phosphorus to the waterbodies fed by the storm drains, causing an overgrowth of aquatic plants and making the water VERY contaminated and dangerous to human and aquatic life through a process called eutrophication—the source of algal blooms and green/black slimy water.

Follow these tips for a tidy, healthy yard this fall:

## Fall Leaves Tips:

**1. Make clean-up easier by mowing leaves into your lawn**—Try mulching leaves into your lawn with a mower to tackle leaves even faster. A mulching mower works best, but you can also try a normal mower at the highest blade setting. Mulching the leaves breaks them into small pieces that will fertilize your lawn as they decompose.

**2. Use leaves as a resource**—In addition to mulching leaves with a mower to fertilize your grass, you can also add mulched leaves to landscaping or compost leaves along with other yard waste and food scraps.

**3. Keep leaves out of streets and storm drains**—Leaves in the streets make flooding more likely. Leaves tend to collect in storm drains and block stormwater from exiting the street. A moderate or heavy rainfall can cause a backup of water when storm drains are not clear. To avoid flooding in our neighborhood, rake up leaves and sweep leaves off the street and storm drain, especially before forecasted rainfall.

**4. Mark your calendar for community leaf pickup days**– Participating in curbside leaf collection is an easy way to take care of leaves on your property.

**5. Never blow or dump leaves into natural areas and common spaces**—Dumping leaves in stormwater ponds, streams, and natural areas negatively impacts water quality and wildlife. Leaves are nutrient-rich and feed algae that form an unattractive green layer on our neighborhood ponds.

Following these tips will help us to all have healthy neighborhoods, yards, common areas, and ponds this fall!