



Christmas Tree Disposal

Solid Waste Management Program fact sheet

6/2006

How to Safely Dispose of Christmas Trees

After the excitement of the holiday season is over, you face the chore of putting away the decorations and disposing of your cut Christmas tree. Disposing of the tree is no longer the simple task of dragging it to the curb side and having it hauled to a sanitary landfill. On Jan. 1, 1992, it became illegal for Missouri landfills to accept yard wastes or Christmas trees for two reasons. First, these materials make up approximately 20 percent of the total solid waste destined for landfills. Secondly, and equally important, there are beneficial uses for these materials.

Christmas tree disposal does not need to be a post-holiday problem. Several environmentally sound disposal methods for Christmas trees are available. Not only are the methods safe for the environment, but they can provide a source of enjoyment for you, your family and your friends.

Christmas Tree Mulch

One way of disposing of a tree in an environmentally sound way is to use a chipping machine to chip it up for landscaping mulch. The mulch can be used in the garden or planting beds to help reduce weed problems, modify soil temperature and help to retain moisture. The chipped material also may be used as part of a nutrient-rich compost if added in moderate amounts.

Many municipalities recycle Christmas trees by chipping them for mulch. Contact your local public works or sanitation department to find out if your community has such a program. If they don't, you may want to suggest that they start one.

Build Fish Habitat

If you have a fishing pond, Christmas trees can be used to improve fish habitat. The trees attract fish of all sizes for a number of reasons. Small fish eat the aquatic insects that find a home in the tree branches. Small fish also use the trees as escape areas from the larger fish that eat them. As a result, the fishing is improved around the trees because more fish are congregated in these areas.

It is easy to prepare your Christmas tree for use as fish habitat. Tie a cement block securely to the stump end of the tree with quarter-inch nylon rope. If you have a boat, you can drop your tree any place you wish in your private lake or pond.

Make sure that the water is the correct depth to cover the top of the tree by no more than four to six feet. If you don't have a boat, wait until the pond is frozen over with at least six inches of ice. Drag your tree with the attached cement block to the place you want it to be. When the ice melts, your tree will sink to the bottom.

The majority of people living in urban or suburban areas do not own lakes or ponds where they can place their tree. Don't place your tree in a lake or pond that is not your own or where you have not received prior permission to do so. You may wish to contact the owners of lakes, whether private or public, to find out if they would like to use your tree to improve fish habitat. Some communities have been working cooperatively with area businesses to collect Christmas trees to place in lakes. However, such disposal may require a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Build Brush Piles For Wildlife

Christmas trees make excellent material to construct brush piles for wildlife. Brush piles provide cover for small mammals, birds, amphibians and reptiles. The animals use the brush piles as shelter from predators, safe resting areas or as a place to nest and raise young. Some good locations for brush piles in rural areas are near field borders of old overgrown fields. Undeveloped areas in suburban yards are potential areas for brush piles. However, you should check local ordinances before constructing a brush pile in a town or subdivision.

The first step in constructing a brush pile is to have a base of large materials such as large rocks, logs or tree stumps on which to pile the Christmas trees. The base allows small animals access to the interior of the brush pile. Stack the trees on the base until the pile is about six feet high. Obviously it will require more than one Christmas tree to build a brush pile. You may want to work cooperatively with friends and neighbors to assure adequate materials to build your brush pile.

Christmas Tree Disposal Dos and Don'ts

Do make sure to remove all Christmas tree trimmings. Most trimmings, tinsel, lights, ornaments and others, are reusable. Trimmings left on the tree can contaminate mulch, pollute water, harm wildlife and cause litter problems. If you decorate your tree for wildlife, make sure you remove those trimmings as well.

Do dispose of your tree in an environmentally safe manner. Disposing of Christmas trees in any of the ways previously described will benefit Missouri's natural resources and will help save landfill space.

Don't burn your Christmas tree in a fireplace or wood stove while it is green. The resins in the green tree can lead to a flue fire.

Trees that have been flocked, those that have had artificial snow applied, may require special handling for any of these disposal methods.

For more information call or write:

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