

Yard Tips 7
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IT'S BORING....

There isn't a whole lot to do in the yard in November, assuming you're all done with planting bulbs for spring blooms. Later in the month, the deciduous trees should be in full dormancy, and as we pointed out last month, mid to late Fall is an excellent time to prune trees. It's probably a little late to be planting new trees and shrubs, though. Freezing temperatures are already a bit tardy, October 15th being the bench mark time after which we don't plant because of freeze danger. Remember to continue with irrigating your lawns at least once or twice a week, particularly if we have dry conditions. Remember, your grass is dormant, not "dead." It still needs water. Also, if we get a spell of real cold weather, you need to shut off the water to your sprinkler system to prevent freeze damage.

Dead leaf collection and removal is about the most (only) challenging project that we meet up with in November. Last month, we advised you to get a mulching kit for your mower deck, if you don't already have one, and mulch the dead leaves instead of raking and bagging them. That device you've been using all summer to blow the grass clippings off the driveway: it's called a "leaf blower." On a not so windy day, use your leaf blower to blow leaves out of your fence and flower beds and other nooks and crannies into your yard where they are accessible and immediately follow up with your mower.

So, what to do in the yard in November? Best advice: Use the extra time on your hands to watch football, do stuff with the kids and grandkids and catch the year end sales on yard tools, supplies and power equipment; and if none of this works, take your spouse on a long trip to someplace warm with a beach.

Since there's not much to write

about for "yard tips," how about a few tips on:

SEPTIC DISPOSAL SYSTEMS

For many of our Raintree neighbors, living with a septic system is a new experience. It's not radically different than having city sewer service, but there are some significant differences, and you need to know what they are. For one thing, you can't use your toilet to dispose of household trash any more. Why not? We'll explain, but first up is a very basic description of septic systems and how they work.

Your septic tank is probably a 1000 or 2000 gallon concrete or heavy duty plastic or fiberglass box that is buried in the ground and connected by a drain pipe to the plumbing system in your house. It collects all the waste water that goes down your sink drains, bathtub and shower drains and toilets. It also collects everything you toss in the toilet and give an absent minded flush to, and where does it end up? In your tank or, worse, in your drain field in your back yard, which consists of buried PVC perforated pipe (lateral lines) which are connected to your septic tank and run out into your yard in parallel patterns. The perforated pipes sit on top of crushed rock that lines the trenches. Top soil is backfilled on top of the pipes.

The septic tank uses anaerobic bacterial organisms to decompose or mineralize the waste discharged into the tank. The resulting fluid leaves the tank and flows into the lateral lines where it is disposed of by evaporation and leaching. The tank must be pumped out periodically, or the solids that collect in the tank will overflow into the lateral lines, and then you have really big trouble. Fixing it will cost a lot of money, not to mention the stress and anxiety if you can't live in your house until the repairs are made, and that can take a long

time.

Over time, with normal operation, lateral lines will eventually fail. It's not a question of "if?" It's a question of "when?" There are solids that inevitably are transported from your tank into your lateral lines, and when enough solids collect and begin blocking your lateral lines, they start to fail. Effluent will start puddling up around them and pooling on top of the ground, and yes it stinks to high heaven.

So, the toilet tissue you buy MUST be marked "septic system safe," and if it isn't, don't buy it. If you don't remember anything else from this column but that, remember that. And, avoid flushing these items or allowing these substances to get into your lateral lines from your sinks or showers: Facial tissue such as Kleenex, cigarette butts, human or animal hair, food, fruit peels or rinds, menstrual hygiene products, cotton balls, Q-tips, medicated cleansing pads not marked as "septic system safe," chewing tobacco or dip, disposable diapers, paint, insecticides, etc. Please note that this list is not intended to be exhaustive. Keep in mind when you flush something down your toilet, it's not gone. It's in your back yard. This is a hard point to get across to folks who are accustomed to using their toilets to dispose of household trash. You just can't do that when you're on a septic system.

So, what happens when your lateral lines fail? You can't just open them up with a shovel and clean them out. That's impossible. About the only thing you can do is to hire a licensed septic system installer to tear your yard up with a backhoe and dig new trenches and install new lateral lines and back-fill them with dirt. Then, you get to bring in topsoil/sand and fill in the heavy equipment ruts in your yard, level it out and either seed or sod the bare areas. That's going to be a lot of work and cost a load of money, Can you hear the cash register going "ca-ching, ca-ching?"

If you have kids or young adults at

home, be sure to impress upon them how important it is to be careful not to flush stuff down the toilet that isn't human waste or septic system safe toilet tissue. They may be greatly amused at this topic, but you have to impress upon them that this is a very serious matter. They will not know, unless you tell them; and maybe, just maybe they will get it; or, more likely... in one ear and out the other. So, you have to keep a close eye on them.

Millions of people live with safe, effective and long lasting septic disposal systems, but there are very simple do's and don'ts that must be followed. If you just use common sense about the stuff you flush down your toilets and wash down your sinks, with proper maintenance your septic system will last for decades.

There is an alternative to lateral lines and drain fields: irrigation/aeration, and it's a pretty attractive option. You still have to refrain from flushing household trash, because you still have a "trash tank" to dispose of solid waste, and it works like your septic tank did. In fact, if you're converting, you can use your old septic tank. There are several manufacturers' configurations of smaller tanks that are used to separate solids, clarify the effluent and chlorinate it, while a pump sends the treated waste water via PVC pipes to popup sprinkler heads that irrigate in a secluded place in the yard, i.e. somewhere your kids won't likely spend a lot of time. It's mostly odorless and supposedly potable. Don't believe that. Converting to an aeration/irrigation system is usually a cheaper and less disruptive alternative to putting in a new, conventional septic system when the old one falters or fails.