**Choices You Make This Fall Can Help Keep Area Waters Clean Next Summer-**

**Keep Leaves Out of the Street**

Red, gold, and orange leaves gently falling from trees; a true symbol that autumn has arrived here in Wisconsin. The choices we make with falling leaves today can impact the health of our land and water next summer. Nutrients released from decaying leaves are a great addition to lawns and gardens, but an unwelcome guest to area lakes and rivers. Leaves and yard debris in the street gets washed directly to lakes and streams via storm drains when it rains. Even if the leaves never move, rainwater running over and through them makes a nutrient-rich tea that’s carried directly to the storm drains promoting algae growth. The good news is that together we can take simple actions to keep leaves and nutrients out of our waters.

* **Mulch-** Mulch leaves directly on the lawn. Shredded leaves act as a natural fertilizer returning nutrients to the lawns. If your lawn mower has a bagger, empty the chopped up leaves on gardens, flowerbeds or around trees and shrubs.
* **Compost-** Mix leaves with other compostable items and spread it on gardens next spring. It saves money and water, helps your gardens, and benefits the environment. For tips on how to start composting, visit http://myfairlakes.com/yardAndGarden.aspx#compost. If you don’t have the room in your yard, take your leaves to the [Dane County compost site](https://www.countyofdane.com/pwht/recycle/compost_sites.aspx).
* **Rake-** If you rake, pile leaves on the terrace, not in the street. Covering the piles with a tarp is a good idea to prevent them from blowing around and reduce nutrients that can leach from them during a rain. Check with your municipality for pick up dates and other requirements so that your leaves are at the curb for as short a time as possible.

For more information on ways to “Love Your Lakes, Don’t Leaf Them” visit: <http://myfairlakes.com/fall_campaign.aspx> .