



PRESS RELEASE

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REMINDER - BURNING OF LEAVES NOT PERMITTED IN MUSCATINE

Composting, mulching, and bagging are better options as leaves accumulate

MUSCATINE, Iowa –Weather and holiday closures along with an abnormally large number of leaves on the ground have created the not-ideal situation for the City of Muscatine Department of Public Works (DPW) of being behind in leaf collection efforts.

The delay in moving from zone to zone has prompted some residents to ponder if they should just burn their leaves instead of waiting for the leaf vacuum trucks to come around.

The simple answer is ... DON'T. It is against the City Code of Muscatine and you could be fined.

“We have not allowed the burning of leaves for as long as I can remember,” Assistant Fire Chief Mike Hartman, who also serves as Muscatine’s Fire Marshal, said. “So, this has been a city ordinance for well over 25 years. When I came on the job the answer to my questions about burning leaves focused on the health/smoke concern and the potential for fires. I believe those are still two critical arguments for banning the burning of leaves.”

According to the City Code of Muscatine there will be no open burning within the corporate City limits without a permit having been issued by a representative of the Fire Department or by special exception of City Council. Section 15-5-2 (D) states that individuals who have



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property of one acre or more can be issued permits to burn landscape waste that commonly consists of leaves, organic matter, and brush and trees gathered from that property.

The reasoning for one acre or more is that these properties are large enough for individuals to locate their burn piles where they do not pose a risk to other structures whether on the individual's property or a neighbor's property. Open burning can only be done between 7 a.m. and 9 p.m. on the days stipulated on the permit. [Section 15-5-5](#) contains other Open Burning Restrictions.

A Fire Department representative will attempt to ensure the fire poses no problem with relation to smoke obscuring roadways, creating a nuisance, or of the fire spreading beyond the control of the responsible individual before a permit is issued.

“With our present open burning ordinance (leaves not allowed to be burned) the most common reason for someone calling in an open burn is because of the smoke,” Hartman said. “The ordinance specifically authorizes our staff to require burning to be discontinued if the smoke is an issue - even if the citizen has a valid burn permit.”

Muscatine Fire Chief Jerry Ewers said his primary responsibility is the prevention of fires, therefore he fully supports the ban on opening burning.

“One of our primary concerns is that these fires tend to get out of control and spread to garages, fences, and other structures,” Ewers said.

Hartman noted that if you have watched a pile of leaves burn, you likely noticed how quickly and easily burning leaves can be swept up by a breeze. Fortunately, this material is not often a competent ignition source once it flies off, but there is potential.

The other primary concern is the health of the community.



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“We interact with many people who have legitimate health issues and are medically impacted by smoke from burning wood,” Hartman said. “With our present ordinance we are able to balance the desire of one citizen to relax by a recreational fire with the personal safety concerns of those with medical conditions.”

“Within the last year we had 32 calls where someone was illegally burning - most of those were called in due to smoke,” Hartman said. “We also had six other calls where someone complained but since the person burning was following the rules, we allowed them to continue.”

So, what options are available to residents since burning leaves is banned by the City of Muscatine (and many other communities in our area including Davenport, Bettendorf, Iowa City, Clinton, Rock Island, and Moline).

The first option is to be patient. Public Works has three crews working extended hours to catch up and complete the second round of collection. A third and final round of collection will be undertaken if the weather holds.

“We have taken 304 leaf loads to the Compost Facility so far this fall,” Brian Stineman, Public Works Director, said. “Last year at this time we only had 178 leaf loads. We have every piece of equipment and every available staff member out working to complete our leaf collection efforts.”

Two other options available for residents include placing the leaves in a City of Muscatine yard waste bag to be picked up on the resident’s refuse collection day, or use the leaves as mulch for their gardens.

City of Muscatine yard waste bags are available at the Muscatine Transfer Station, HyVee stores, and at Fareway Grocery. Grass clippings, leaves, and garden waste can be placed in these bags and set next to the resident’s refuse bin on their collection day. The bags will be picked up by the Solid Waste Division and taken to the Muscatine Compost Facility.



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Yard waste bags that have store brand names on them will not be picked up. However, residents of Muscatine and Fruitland can take these bags to the Compost Facility at their convenience.

The Compost Facility at the Transfer Station is scheduled to close for the season on December 11 but hours may be extended if leaf collection continues. The Compost Site will be open from 12-5 p.m. Sunday through Friday and from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. on Saturdays.

Iowa DNR encourages three ways to handle fall leaves –

Fall leaves are beautiful – until they pile up in your yard. Don't send those precious nutrients up in smoke. Instead, put those nuisance leaf piles to good use. Leaves, small branches and other landscape materials can nourish your lawn, garden or community.

It's easy:

1. **Compost.** Composting leaves and food scraps is a great way to turn this waste into garden nutrients. A good compost mix needs both carbon (dead or dry leaves) and nitrogen (green materials like food scraps and grass clippings). Many types and sizes of compost containers are available. For tips on low-tech ways to compost, see a [DNR tutorial](#).
2. **Mulch.** Your lawn will love you if you chop up and leave your leaves in place. Leaves are a free, natural fertilizer that enriches your soil with organic matter. You can use your regular lawn mower. Or, use a mulching lawn mower to shred and mix leaves and grass into your yard.
3. **Bag it.** If you have too many leaves or branches to compost, you can bag the leaves and tie up the branches to be collected or have a drop-off at the [Muscatine Compost Facility](#). The upside is that anyone can pick up composted materials for their yards or gardens from the Compost Facility.
 - a) Yard waste is collected on a residents refuse collection day but only in bags with the City of Muscatine logo on them. (See [GUIDELINES](#)).
 - b) Yard Waste in any paper bag along with tree limbs and other trimmings can be taken to the Compost Facility during normal hours operation.



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- c) Residents of Muscatine and Fruitland can drop off yard waste free of charge with proof of residency. A small fee is charged for non-residents.

For some, burning leaves seems to capture the nostalgic smell of autumn. But breathing [leaf smoke](#) pulls pollutants such as carbon monoxide, soot and toxic chemicals into your lungs. While it may smell good, smoke is especially harmful to children, the elderly, and those with respiratory or heart problems. Turning leaves into nutrients is the healthy way to protect your and your neighbor's lungs.

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