

Garden & Landscape Waste Prevention



Is garden waste really that big a deal in Ireland?

Grassy areas or managed lawns generate more "waste" materials and require more fertiliser than any other planting schemes of similar size. In late spring and summer, 75% or more of all landscape trimmings consist of grass cuttings.

In Ireland, we dispose of roughly 100,000 tonnes of green waste each year, half of which are grass cuttings. That's about 5,000 full rubbish trucks of grass clippings alone, each year! Even with the roll out of "Brown Bin" collections throughout the country in recent years, a lot of this material still ends up in landfills where they take up limited landfill space and degrade to pollute surface and ground waters, create foul odours, attract pests, and generate methane gas, a greenhouse gas 20x more potent than carbon dioxide.

Illegally dumped garden waste can also be a serious issue for local communities, Apart from looking unsightly, it can cause flooding through blocked drains and the smothering of natural vegetation. In addition, garden waste, containing certain species of weeds from garden ponds, has resulted in serious invasion of rivers and lakes. The eradication of these invasive species costs the state millions annually.

So what can householders do?

As they say, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" and in the case of garden waste, this is especially true. Preventing and reducing garden waste requires a whole new way of thinking. The first question to be considered is: How can I design and manage my garden to minimise waste in the first place?



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When determining if it is possible to reduce garden waste, the following should be considered:

- How is the garden area used for play areas, pets or for enjoying the outdoors?
- How much lawn is really necessary for play areas or for pets?
- Are annual flower beds really the best choice for adding colour to your garden when these can be time consuming and costly?
- Are there areas of the garden that can be allowed to go a little "wild," planted with low maintenance plants or replaced with paving, bricks, stone, or gravel?
- What level of maintenance is needed for maintaining plant health and the reasonable appearance of your garden?
- Can grass cuttings be left on the lawn?
- Can hedges or bushes be left unshowered without offending neighbours or infringing on other plants or uses of garden space?
- Can selective pruning, mowing, watering and fertilising reduce garden trimmings without sacrificing the appearance and health of your garden?

By answering these questions, it should be possible to reduce the quantity of garden waste generated through:

- Permanent improvements to the design of your property and what plants you choose to grow.
- Simple and immediate changes in how you manage your garden and outdoor area.

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How to prevent and minimise garden waste?

Garden waste can be prevented through better design and it can be minimised through better management and maintenance of your outdoor areas. The main things to consider include:

1. Good Garden Design

Putting some thought into the design or redesign of your garden will pay dividends in terms of reducing the amount of work required to maintain your garden, decreasing the amount of money spent on disposing or recycling landscape trimmings, and lessening the environmental impact of this waste. Let's examine the garden bit by bit.

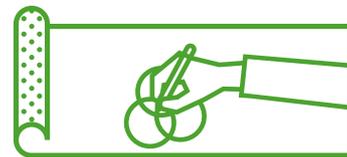
Lawns

- Traditionally, most gardens have at least a small section of lawn. However, grass areas take significant effort to maintain in terms of cutting and management of the grass cuttings generated. Here are some of the key things to consider regarding grass areas:
 - Reduce the amount of lawn around your home by:
 - Replacing lawn areas with wild flowers or grass pastures that look very attractive and are a haven for wildlife. Paths can be mown through the meadow to add interest.
 - Replacing grass areas with large beds of trees, shrubs, perennial flowering plants and herbs that create a self-sustaining recycling system. Fallen leaves and twigs can be left on the ground as mulch. Trimmings from these beds can also be composted or shredded and used as a mulch.
 - Creating planting beds to connect existing trees or shrubs isolated in lawns.
 - Installing a patio or building a deck.
 - Replacing turf areas worn down by heavy foot traffic with pavers or mulch.
 - For new lawns, use low maintenance lawn seed mixes. Look for dwarf or slow growing varieties to reduce the frequency of mowing required.
 - Limit lawns to areas where they experience optimal conditions. Lawns grown in shady areas or in poor or wet soils often become weedy, mossy, disease prone and difficult to mow. By using alternative plants that

are better suited to these conditions, you can create a landscape that is healthier and easier to maintain.

Planting Areas

Planting beds with ground covers, flowers, bulbs and herbs are a beautiful way to replace grass areas and improve the appearance of your garden. Remember that planting areas that mimic natural systems with native plant varieties produce less waste, use less water and fertiliser, and require less maintenance than manicured gardens or lawns. Replacing annual flowers with perennial varieties can provide the same beautiful flowery natural look without all of the work associated with planting and fussing with annuals every year.



Hedges

Before planting your boundaries, consider the following:

- Do you need a hedge? Is it for shelter, increased privacy, or do you need to screen out a bad view? On the other hand, if you have your lovely views of rolling fields and grazing animals, why hide it away by planting up your boundaries. If screening is required, around a patio for instance, you could consider earth mounding instead.
- Which plant variety will suit the soil and local environment? Have a look around and see what is growing well in your area. Mixed indigenous hedgerows will require no maintenance, are hardy and long lasting, and will attract and sustain a variety of wildlife in a large garden when allowed to grow to their full potential.
- When considering a particular hedging variety, think about how big it will grow and how much clipping it will require? Fast growing is great when you need shelter or screening initially, but as time goes on, this hedge will need constant trimming and generate heaps of waste. Slower growing plants will work better in the long term.
- How much waste is the boundary hedge going to generate and how is it going to be disposed of? Consider using a mixture of garden trees and ornamental shrubs to achieve shelter and screening which require no annual trimming and will give colour and interest all year round. For instance, slow growing hedges, such as Beech, require much less trimming than Griselinia or

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1. Good Garden Design - continued

Shrubberies

One of the main issues encountered in shrubberies is that, as the plants mature, they require regular and ongoing maintenance. Pruning of bushes and trees can be a time-consuming process that generates large quantities of garden waste. Therefore, bushes and trees need to be scaled to the size of the garden. In bigger spaces, large growing shrubs can be spaced out generously and the gaps between them planted with perennials and bulbs. In smaller gardens, consider smaller shrubs instead of trees which can grow to dominate the space. If plants are carefully chosen and spaced according to their growth potential, little pruning is ever required.

Slow growing native and dwarf varieties are great for small spaces. Plants such as colourful azaleas and broad-leaf evergreen rhododendrons require little pruning and grow well in Ireland.

Plus many common plants come in smaller or dwarf varieties that don't grow too big.

Of course some pruning may be necessary to:

- Shape a plant - topiary
- Improve fruiting potential - fruit trees & bushes
- Remove dead, damaged or diseased foliage

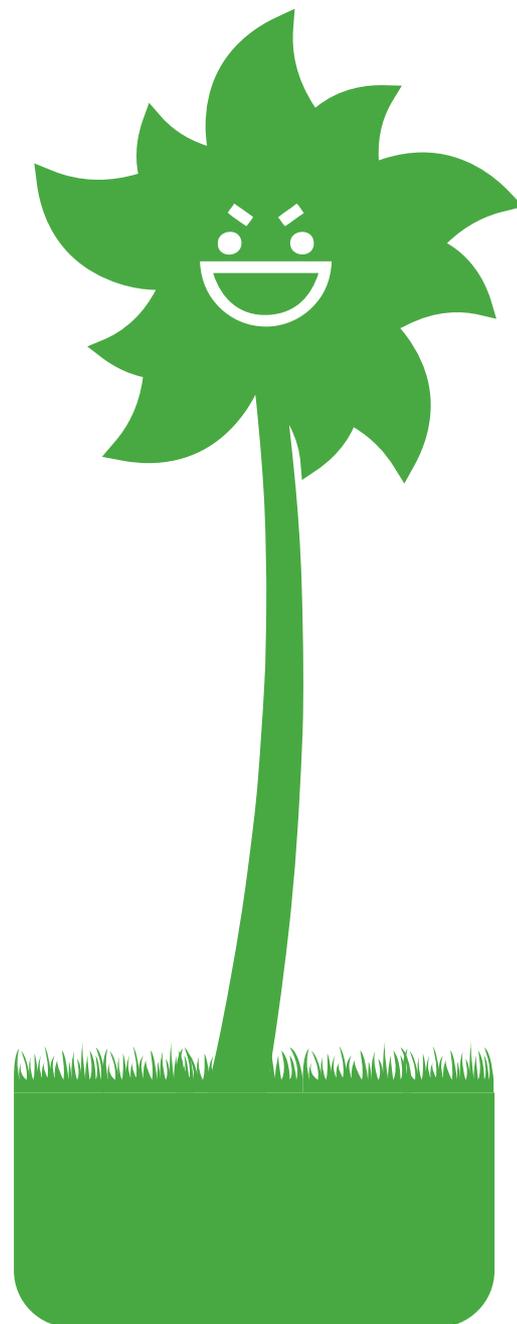
Otherwise, with a well designed shrubbery, pruning should not be required. Remember:

Right Plant, Right Place!

Weed Control

The bane of the gardener's life is weeding. The best way to manage weeds is to design your garden so that it takes care of that job for you. You can do this by:

- Layering plants. This is a method of planting that mimics a natural forest. The top canopy consists of trees, next the tall shrubs, then the lower shrubs and finally, the ground cover plants and bulbs. The trees must be spaced out generously, approximately 8m centres, to allow light to penetrate through to the different layers. The tall shrubs should also be spaced out to approximately 3m centres. The remaining layers can be planted according to their natural spread. The aim of the system is to gain colour and interest from the ground right up to the tops of the trees and to cover all of the soil, thus avoiding weed growth. With the wide spacing of the bigger plants, the need for pruning is reduced.
- Use groundcovers. These spreading plants blank out the light and cover the soil preventing weed growth.



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2. Better Landscape Management and Maintenance

Better landscape maintenance practices can reduce the work required to manage your garden and can also reduce the cost of purchasing soil amendments and fertilisers. Here are some of our top tips:

General Maintenance



- Don't over water or over fertilise. You save money on fertiliser and keep plants from growing too big which require trimming or pruning.
- Feed your garden with compost instead of chemical fertilisers. As compost breaks down in your garden soil or as a mulch on top of the soil, it releases nutrients that slowly feeds plants throughout the garden season. Chemical fertilisers over-stimulate plant growth when applied resulting in leggy and weak plants that are more susceptible to disease.
- Use natural fertiliser teas. Tea fertiliser can be made from your homemade compost, nettles, comfrey, and cattle manure. It's another way of using your garden waste to enhance the landscape around your home.
- Bare soil leeches nutrients. Ensure soil has a good density of plant cover, mulch, or green manure to reduce erosion.

Lawns

Why collect grass cuttings? GrassCycling or leaving the cuttings on the lawn while mowing makes lawns greener, healthier and can supply up to a third of your lawn's fertiliser needs. Studies have also shown that although you are cutting the lawn more often in summer months, overall you are spending less time managing grass areas throughout the year because you do not need to collect, bag up, bin or compost the clippings. It also saves money in extra bin collection charges. GrassCycling is simple and does not require special equipment although there are special mulching mowers which make GrassCycling easier. We have a GrassCycling fact sheet on our website that explains the system and provides tips for success.

Planting Areas

Use mulch in all planting areas to suppress weed growth and preserve moisture in the soil -fewer weeds means less time maintaining your garden and less waste. Mulching involves covering the soil with a layer of organic matter. This is a great way of recycling your trimmings back into the garden. Organic mulches can consist of homemade compost, leaf mould, chipped bark, shredded bush or tree trimmings and autumn leaves. An overgrown area can be brought under control with mulch very effectively by cutting down all the growth as low as possible, cover with a layer of cardboard and then adding a thick layer of organic mulch. Top it up every year to keep the weeds at bay. This is so important that we have created a separate informational flyer on mulching.

Hedges & Shrubberies

Allow hedges and bushes to grow out to their natural form and use selective pruning when needed instead of regularly shearing them to maintain a certain size or particular shape.