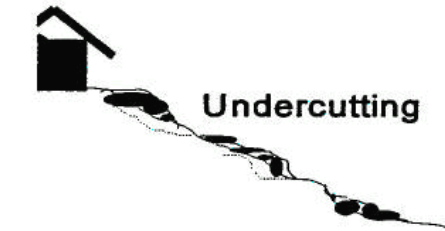

FACT SHEET: YARD WASTE DISPOSAL

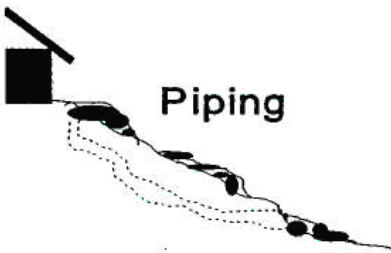
Landfills in Missouri have stopped taking yard waste which leaves many homeowners looking for a natural, low cost method of disposing of their debris. A forested area, a streambank or a steep slope, especially a slope that already has erosion problems, may seem like a suitable place to deposit this debris. We may even think that we are doing the environment a favor by depositing this waste in an area where it can decompose naturally. Unfortunately, this is not true and in fact can be the beginning of disastrous environmental problems. Yard waste dumped in these areas tends to be in large concentrated piles, which makes decomposition much harder if not impossible. Large piles of debris persist for years, and can cause severe property damage.

Filling eroded areas of your yard or common ground with yard waste, especially on steep slopes or stream banks will only lead to greater erosion problems in the future.

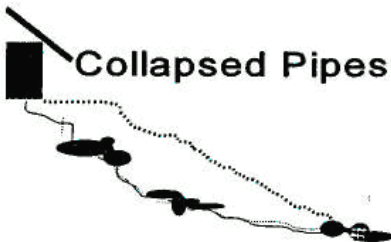
How this occurs.....



Dense piles of leaves, grass clippings, twig's and/or branches are built up over time on steep slopes or in areas where erosion has already begun. Sunlight and air cannot reach the ground under these piles which causes the ground cover to die. Water works under the pile and starts to undercut. Small rills form which enlarge after each rain.



Often, small animals, such as moles or groundhogs burrow under piles of debris to get at the grubs that like to live there. Water enters these burrows and enlarges them causing "piping" erosion. When the ground is undercut enough, the "pipes" collapse which may cause slumping or vastly accelerated erosion.



Over time and as the piles of debris grow, the erosion becomes more severe. Eventually, this can threaten trees and other vegetation that are holding the slope in place. Trees begin to die and topple over which in turn, causes faster and more serious erosion that may threaten yards, structures and roads.

Taxpayers foot the bill for Improper disposal of yard waste which can result in soil erosion and water quality concerns.

- Water treatment costs increase since the soil that eroded from the slope must be removed from our drinking water supply during water treatment.
- Pesticides and fertilizers applied to our lawns are attached to the soil particles that eroded away. In water they detach from the soil particle and can contaminate our streams and eventually our drinking water . These contaminants are expensive to remove from the public water supply.
- The soil that is suspended in water (sediment) can fill up a local drinking water reservoir. In order to maintain the water supply in the reservoir it would have to be dredged. This is very expensive and the cost would probably be passed on to the customer .

Suggestions!

There are solutions to the homeowner's problem of grass clippings. The following suggestions may not be possible for everyone:

- 1) *Turn your problem into an asset.* Grass clippings and leaves, recycled properly, can reduce your fertilizer costs, and, by leaving clippings on your lawn to decompose naturally, you can actually save time and money. Grass stores part of the fertilizer that you apply to your lawn, then, as clippings decompose, they release this stored fertilizer. Grass clippings left on your lawn provide 25% of the fertilizer needs, and mowing time can be cut by 30% if the clippings are not collected.
- 2) *When you're handed a lemon, make lemonade,* or in this case, compost. Compost provides vital nutrients that can help plants grow and thrive. University Outreach and Extension has informational pamphlets that lead you step-by-step toward establishing your own compost pile.
- 3) *Join the crowd.* Some cities also have compost piles where you can take your yard waste. There are also private companies that will take your clippings and other debris. There may or may not be a fee, depending on your location.

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