

Garage, lawn and garden



Taking care of your car and your yard can result in a lot of waste that is not recyclable and may be hazardous. Garages can also become a storage locker for all of the “stuff” that doesn’t have a place inside the house. However, you can reduce your impact by keeping your automobiles and miscellaneous yard-care equipment in good shape and choosing greener options for yard care.

capturing dust and leaving surfaces streak-free.

Green auto tips

Fix leaks

Keep an eye on the floor underneath your vehicle and make sure to have leaks fixed. If you do have an oil spill, avoid chemicals cleaners by using clay cat litter to soak up the oil. If you want to remove the stain, use dish soap and a small amount of hot water. Be sure to absorb the oily liquid and put it in a container. Oil and gasoline soaked rags and absorbents should be stored in a small, airtight, non-combustible (such as metal) container with a tight-fitting lid. An old paint can is a good example. The sealed can should be disposed of at a Hennepin County drop-off facility.

Changing your oil

If you change your oil at home, bring used oil and filters to a local auto shop for recycling. Store your used oil in a clearly labeled plastic container with a tight fitting cap. You can also bring used oil to a Hennepin County drop-off facility. Never put your used oil, filters, or oil-soaked cloths in the trash. See the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency’s earth-friendly tips for changing your own oil at pca.state.mn.us/living-green/changing-your-oil-earth-friendly-guide-do-it-yourselfers.

When you buy oil for an oil change, look for re-refined (aka recycled) oil. To guarantee this oil has the same specifications as virgin oil, look for the API Certification mark.

Washing your car

The best way to clean your car is to bring it to a car wash. Car wash facilities are required by law to treat dirty water before it is released into systems that enter lakes, streams and rivers. They also tend to use less water per wash than a person using a hose. If you do wash your car at home, make sure to do it on the lawn, dirt or gravel so that the soap and greasy grime doesn’t run directly into your neighborhood storm drains.

Cleaning the interior

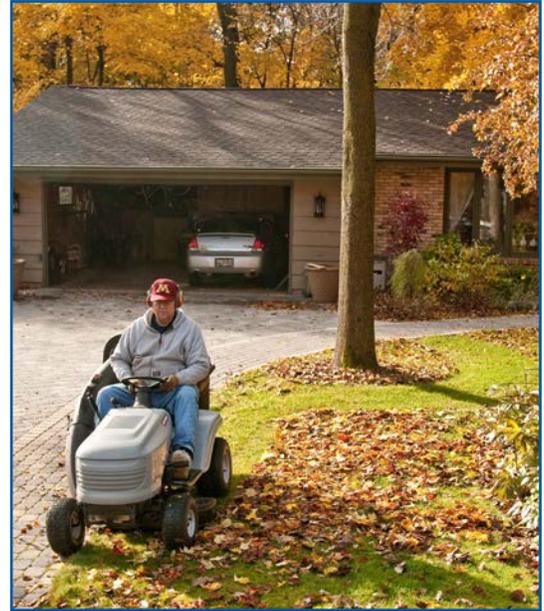
To clean and refresh carpets and upholstery, sprinkle on baking soda and let it set for at least 30 minutes before vacuuming it up. Wipe down internal surfaces with a damp cloth and skip the chemical detailing products.



Reduce waste in the garage

Take the following steps to prevent waste in your garage:

- Donate or sell old or unused items like bikes, tools, plant containers, and sports equipment your kids have outgrown so you don't end up throwing them away many years down the road when they might be obsolete.
- Keep cars, motorcycles, lawn mowers, and other lawn equipment with engines tuned up so they last a long time without needing to be replaced.
- Share tools with your neighbors or become a member of a tool library. The Minnesota Tool Library has a variety of tools available for its members to borrow. Learn more at mntoolibrary.org.
- Plan for winter by draining and bringing in hoses so they don't burst, covering or storing lawn furniture so it doesn't fade or crack, and making sure you don't let any chemicals or paints stored in the garage freeze.



Reduce hazardous lawn chemicals

You can pull weeds by hand or use vinegar to kill plants growing in your sidewalk or driveway cracks. You can also use compost to fertilize gardens. To keep a low-waste lawn, check out the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's guide to reducing pesticides and fertilizers. Some tips include letting your lawn grow a little higher, keeping mower blades sharp, leaving grass clippings on the lawn, and watering less often but more deeply (see www.pca.state.mn.us/living-green/grow-healthy-no-waste-lawn-and-garden for in-depth information). You may want to even consider turning over part of the lawn to garden space if grass doesn't do particularly well in your location.

Avoid poisons, pesticides and fertilizers when at all possible, and make sure that you read labels for proper storage. Remember to keep all hazardous products out of reach of children and animals. Keep products in the original containers and make sure the labels and safety information are legible. Cloths soaked in oil, gasoline, oil-based stain and varnish, turpentine, linseed oil, or other hazardous materials should be collected in a tight fitting, nonflammable container and taken to a Hennepin County drop-off facility. See the How to identify and reduce hazardous chemicals in your home guide at hennepin.us/residents/recycling-hazardous-waste/reduce-household-hazardous-waste for more details.

