

Austin guide to... **LEAF BLOWERS**

Leaf blowers can be an efficient way to deal with cleaning up yard clippings, dirt and trash. They can save time and money (particularly for professional landscaping firms), and clean areas covered with mulch more effectively than raking.

However, they can have a negative impact on our health and the environment.

Problems:

• **Air Pollution:**

- Exhaust emissions from gas-powered blowers contain hydrocarbons, particulate matter and carbon monoxide, which when combined with other gases, form ozone and other toxic contaminants. Per gallon of gasoline, they are about ten times more polluting than cars
- Disturbing dust can cause respiratory problems

• **Noise Pollution:** While just a nuisance for most, those using leaf blowers professionally/repeatedly are at increased risk of hearing loss

• **Water Pollution:**

- Leaves and debris blown into the street end up in creeks; as they decompose, they can deplete the water of oxygen and potentially cause fish kills
- Pollutant-laden dirt and sediment can add toxins to the water

• **Flood Hazards:** Leaves, trash and debris can clog storm drains and drainageways, causing them to back up and create localized flooding



For more earth-wise gardening tips, visit
www.growgreen.org

- Make sure you are at least 50' from people and pets when using blower
- Wear hearing protection if using repeatedly
- Use goggles to protect eyes
- Wear protective clothing including long pants and enclosed shoes
- Wear a respirator if needed

Solutions:

- **Air Pollution:**
 - Purchase electric-powered models
 - Either avoid dusty areas, or pre-wet them to reduce creation of dust
 - Begin blowing with nozzle close to the ground then lift it to a height that doesn't blow dust, before blowing large areas
 - Avoid using a blower to clean up gravel or construction dirt
- **Noise Pollution:**
 - Purchase electric-powered models
 - Use the lowest possible throttle speed
 - Check and clean the muffler, air intakes and filter
 - Buy a newer, cleaner, blower with a lower decibel level
 - Avoid using very early or very late in the day
- **Water Pollution and Flood Control:**
 - Blow leaves back onto the grass or other vegetated area or bag them for recycling
 - Vacuum the material instead of blowing
 - Bag yard debris in paper bags so it can be recycled
 - Clean up any fuel spills with kitty litter, bag the material and throw in the garbage
 - Collect trash and any accumulated sediment and bag for disposal

References:

- California Environmental Protection Agency, "A Report to the California Legislature on the Potential Health and Environmental Impacts of Leaf Blowers", February 2000
- Outdoor Power Equipment Institute: www.opei.org

