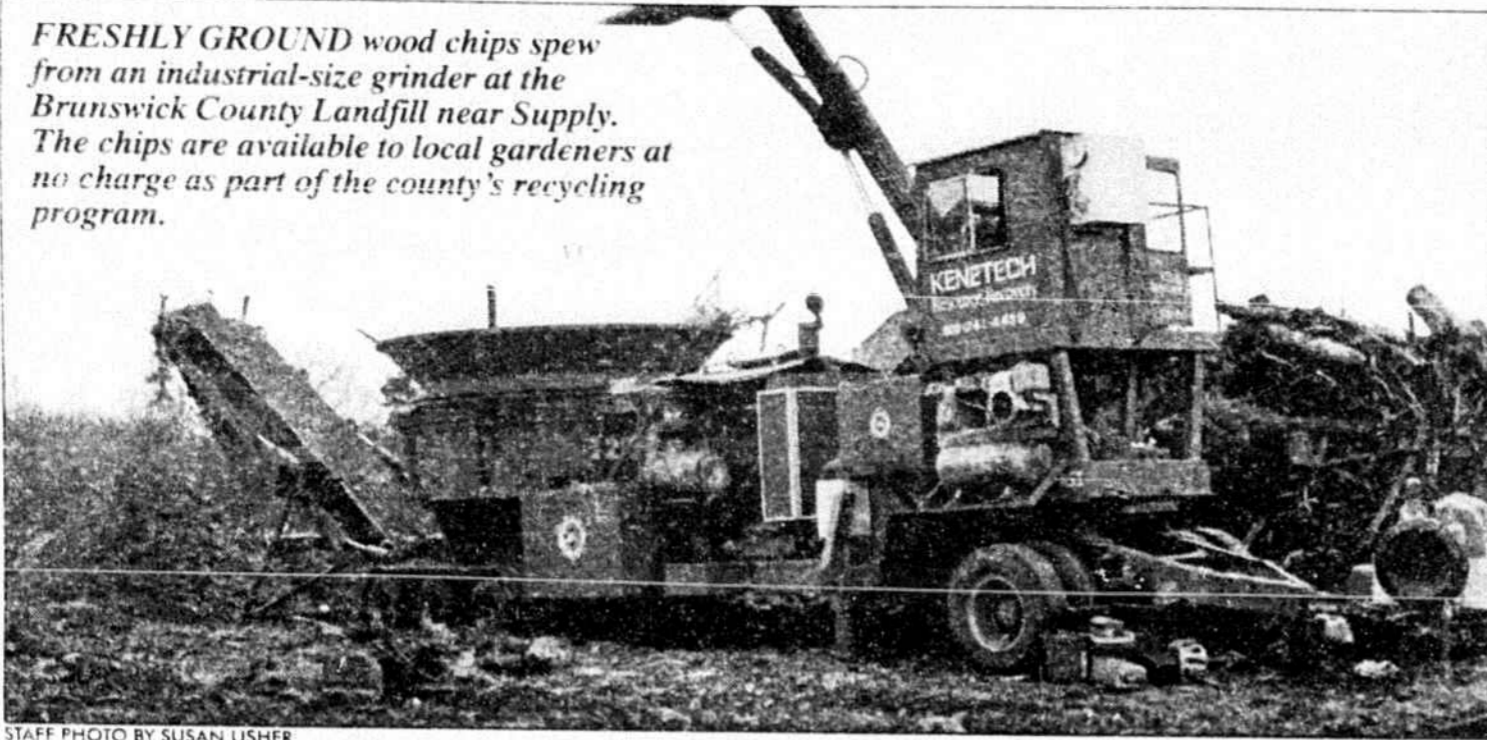


FRESHLY GROUND wood chips spew from an industrial-size grinder at the Brunswick County Landfill near Supply. The chips are available to local gardeners at no charge as part of the county's recycling program.



STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

Brunswick County Landfill Offering Free Wood Chips

Brunswick County's landfill may not look like much, but since mid-January it's been gaining in popularity among home gardeners as the place to go—for free mulch and composting material.

From grass clippings to tree stumps and old pallets, a contractor hired by Brunswick County has been turning one home's trash into another's treasure. Wood chips for composting, mulching and soil amending are provided by the county at no cost, as part of efforts to reduce the volume of waste going into the landfill and to comply with state laws that promote recycling.

Ground waste is piled in windrows for easy access, and is available to the public at no charge during regular landfill hours.

Using a backhoe, county landfill employees will load the material at no charge Wednesdays from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. and from 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. During other landfill operating hours, do-it-yourselfers can load their own trucks, providing their own shovels and pitchforks.

The landfill opens Monday at 7 a.m. and Tuesdays through Saturdays at 8 a.m. The site closes at 4:30 p.m., but trash drop-off or mulch pick-up should be completed by 4 p.m.

"Once people find out what this can do for their soils, there's going to be a waiting list," predicted Brunswick County Cooperative Extension Agent David Nash.

The chipped woody material can be used in any of several ways:

■As a mulch around bedding plants to reduce moisture loss and protect from temperature extremes;

■As composting material. Combined with other household waste such as kitchen scraps (minus meats and fat), the chips can be composted. Composting speeds up the natural decay process for organic materials. The finished product can be used to amend soils.

■Incorporated into sandy soils, compost helps hold moisture and helps retain added nutrients and make those nutrients readily available for plant use.

■Incorporated into clay soils, compost improves drainage and helps retain added nutrients.

■Chips can be tilled directly into garden soils for amendment; if so, give the bed a little extra attention. During the decay process, microorganisms take nitrogen from the soil or any other available source. Nash's advice: Add a slow-release form of nitrogen when the chips are tilled in, or "spoon feed" the bed throughout the season to ensure an adequate supply of nitrogen.

He also recommends taking soil samples after the soil has been amended "to get a true picture of what you've got." Soil sample kits can be obtained from the extension office or any garden shop at no cost. The completed kits can be mailed directly to the N.C. Department of Agriculture lab for testing, or taken to the extension office for delivery to the lab the next time any staff member goes to Raleigh. There is no charge for the test.

Getting to the landfill:

The Brunswick County Landfill is off Galloway Road in Supply. The marked turn-off is 2.3 miles north of the N.C. 211/U.S. 17 traffic light. The pavement ends almost immediately and the dirt road forks; take the unmarked left fork.

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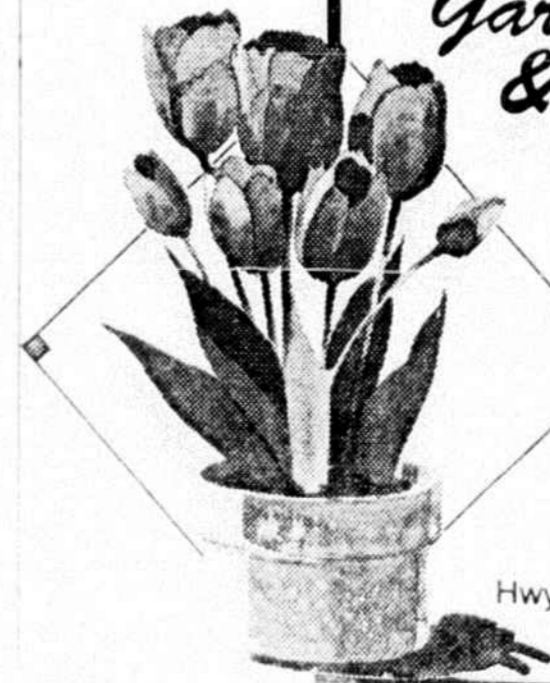


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