

Leave 'Em Be

Go Green Winnetka joins the Glencoe Sustainability Task Force and other community environmental groups and asks you to "Leave the Leaves" this autumn. Let leaves stay where they fall this fall!

The Benefits of Leaving the Leaves

You may have grown up thinking leaves create lawn litter and should be removed. It's time for some new thinking! Leaving the leaves has a positive effect on our health and our environment's health by reducing the need for chemical fertilizers on lawns, improving the quality of our lakes, and supporting biodiversity in our backyards.

Fallen leaves offer a double benefit to our landscapes - they form a natural mulch that helps suppress weeds and they fertilize the soil as they break down. Why spend money on mulch and fertilizer when you can make your own? Leaving the leaves in your yard reduces the need for fertilizers, enhances the health of your soil, and improves our lake ecosystems and our enjoyment of them.

Leaving the leaves also enhances vital wildlife habitat. Birds, mammals, turtles, toads, invertebrates, and more rely on leaf litter for food, shelter, and nesting material. Many moth and butterfly caterpillars overwinter in fallen leaves before emerging in spring. Leaving the leaves creates essential cover that helps pollinators and others live through the winter.

Reducing the Need for Leaf Blowers

Removing leaves often involves intensive yard equipment, such as gas-powered leaf blowers, as well as trucks to haul away leaves. Gas-powered leaf blowers emit exceedingly high levels of pollutants, contribute to greenhouse gas emissions, are linked to a number of serious diseases, and can cause hearing loss. If you employ a landscaper, make sure they follow any local ordinances regarding leaf blowers. Leaving the leaves reduces your home's carbon footprint, saves your wallet, and equitably improves our collective health and air quality.

What to Do With the Leaves?

What should you do with all those fallen leaves? Here are some ideas:

- Use leaves as natural lawn mulch. Cut leaves into small pieces, which allows them to fall into and beneath the grass canopy instead of resting upon it and allows for faster decomposition and nutrient absorption.
- Use leaves as free mulch and winter ground cover for gardens and around shrubs and trees. Shred your leaves and pile them on top of your annual garden or around perennial plants and shrubs, which helps insulate plants and protect them from winter freeze damage. Till the leaves into your garden in the spring.
- Use leaves in compost! Combine equal parts fallen leaves ("brown material") with food waste and grass clippings ("green material") and keep moist and well mixed. You'll have nutrient-rich compost to add to your garden next spring.
- Use leaves to build a brush shelter. Along with branches, sticks and stems, leaves can be used to make brush piles that shelter native wildlife.



Need one more reason to leave the leaves? The less time you spend raking leaves, the more time you'll have to enjoy the gorgeous fall weather and the wildlife that visits our area.

STAY UP-TO-DATE ON SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS IN
OUR COMMUNITY BY SIGNING UP FOR OUR NEWSLETTER AT
GOGREENWINNETKA.ORG
JOIN US FOR ONE OF OUR MONTHLY MEETINGS
AND FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM