

Leaves, Leaves Everywhere!

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Even with our recent low temperatures, some trees still have not dropped many leaves. Added to the leaves that were beneath the snow layer starts one thinking about yet another trip to the city drop off area. It's great that Pierre provides this site, but there's a couple of outlet for these leaves that can become added bonuses to your property.



Fallen leaves are free, except for your labor. Think of them as unintended gifts from your upwind neighbors – you know, the ones you drop 20lbs of zucchini on their doorstep at 2am. But these freebies hold valuable nutrients and organic matter that can help your garden as well as give some added protection to your trees and shrubs and can be used in a variety of manners.

First, fallen leaves should be removed for a healthy lawn. Leaves left on the grass both shade the ground from the sun and also prevent wind from drying the area creating the habitat mildews and fungus prefer. If they get a foot hold it then takes extra effort to defeat them. You can rake in the spring, but you also run the risk of damaging emerging grass. It's much better to remove leaves in the fall.

Some roses, primarily grafted roses that have a different root stock that their above ground growing parts, benefit from insulating mulch piled against their bases and lower stems over winter. This insulating mulch can be leaves, dirt, grass clippings, or a combination and help prevent freeze-thaw damage in the spring. Once spring brings longer days and warmer weather, carefully pull the mulch away and replace decorative mulch if needed or spread the mulch around the plant to help conserve moisture and prevent weed growth.

Leaves can also be used in the garden as mulch or compost. A three inch or more mulch of leaves and grass clippings between plant rows creates a very effective weed barrier throughout the growing season. At the end of the season that weed barrier can be worked into the top couple of inches of soil that over time will add nutrients and organic material to your garden. Freshly fallen leaves can also be worked into the garden or added to a compost pile as well, but there's another option that will give up the nutrients even quicker.

Before the mower is put to bed for the winter, lower it's blades and run over leaf piles multiple times creating smaller and smaller particles. Now instead of having intact leaves with a top surface, a bottom surface, and just a little edge, the same material chopped into small pieces collectively will still have that same top surface, the same bottom surface, but much, much more edge. This will break down much faster than whole leaves and can be incorporated into the top few inches of garden or added to the compost pile.

Fallen leaves are probably more valuable than you think!

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