

What is the Best Way to Manage Leaves?

1. Reuse leaves by shredding them into the lawn when mowing.



Simply remove the bag from your mower and let the shredded grass clippings and leaves fertilize your soil. Mulching takes less time than bagging, because you don't have to stop to empty the bag. If too many leaves are covering the grass take an extra trip over the lawn with the mower to shred them finer and disperse them more evenly. Clumps may form and when left on the surface of the turf grass can negatively effect the plant underneath. The best solution is to remove the excess leaves and use them on planted beds as mulch or use mulching mowers which cut grass clippings and leaves into smaller pieces. Mulching

blades could be installed on a regular mower providing a mulching function. Finely shredded leaves are more easily incorporated into the lawn and decompose faster. For more information check: bit.ly/2cp6bub

2. Reuse shredded leaves as mulch, compost ingredient or let them turn into mold.



The excess leaves can be: shredded and applied around the plants, used for compost (beneficial soil amendment) or left to turn into leaf mold.

Shredding leaves:

- increases the surface area, giving microbes many more places to work
- prevents the leaves from packing together into layers that won't let water or air penetrate
- dramatically reduces their volume (14:1)

Leaf shredding equipment:

- Lawn Mower: Mow over leaves while on the ground with the lawn mower and either pick them up with the bag attachment, rake them up or blow them over the planted areas.



- String Trimmer: Rake up leaves and put them in a garbage can or compost bin. Crank up your string trimmer and use it to shred the leaves inside the garbage can or bin. For more information, see this YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lObjKkLfKVs>



- Leaf Blower: Use the shred and vacuum feature available on certain leaf blowers.



- Shredder: Run leaves through a shredder to obtain great mulch and significantly decrease their volume.



How to Use Shredded Leaves:

- Apply shredded leaves around plants: Up to 3-inch blanket of leaves protects tender plants from winter wind and cold. If leaf mulch is not aesthetically appealing the area could be dressed with a thin layer of regular mulch on the top to finish it up with fresh color. For more information, click here: bit.ly/2ckBTu5



- Boost Your Compost Pile: Carbon-rich leaves balance nitrogen rich compost ingredients. To create a good compost, mix a 1:3 ratio of green to brown material. Green material is nitrogen rich and includes fresh grass clippings, coffee grounds, manure, fruits and vegetable scraps, etc. Brown material consists of dead plant (carbon rich) such as **fall leaves**, hay, paper, straw, etc. There is no right or wrong recipe to make compost. A mix of browns and greens is good enough for Mother Nature to take care of the decomposition process. If desired, compost management will shorten the breakdown time to a few weeks instead of months when left alone. Compost management includes maintaining proper moisture and aeration. The pile or enclosure should be large enough to allow the center portion to generate and keep high temperature released by bacteria during the organic waste transformation process. Turning the compost pile from time to time provides air supply to decomposing organisms. Proper moisture is needed for microbial growth and efficiency. For more information check: bit.ly/2cChIZn



Compost is a very beneficial soil amendment. It contains macro- and micro-nutrients which are released slowly making them easily available to plants. Compost buffers the soil and brings pH levels to the optimum range for nutrient availability. It improves soil structure by creating aggregates which open up the soil for water, air and nutrient circulation. This organic amendment helps retain moisture and restores microbial life which is crucial for suppressing diseases, harmful pests and weeds. Compost decrease or eliminates the need for synthetic fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides.

- Improve Your Soil: Mix shredded leaves right into your garden. This addition of organic material will improve the soil structure, drainage and moisture as well as restore beneficial microbial life.
- Make "Leaf Mold": Simply rake the leaves into a big pile or store them in a bin, black contractors' bag or wire cage to keep them in place. If you shred them, they will decompose faster. The leaves should be watered to ensure proper moisture and left alone for up to two years. During this time,

decomposition will be caused mainly by fungi that break down lignin. To expedite the process compost activators could be added.

Leaf mold could be used to increase soil drainage and moisture retention. It is perfect mulch for perennial plantings and extensive shrubbery to protect their roots, moderate the soil temperature, prevent weed growth and preserve moisture in soil. Leaf mold is high in calcium and magnesium and retains three to five times its weight in water. For more information check: bit.ly/2ckCY55



Think Before You Shred!

- Be careful with some kinds of leaves. Walnut leaves contain substances that inhibit plant growth. It's best to compost these leaves before using them in your garden.



- Different leaves have different decomposition rates. Leaves which are easy to break down include: ash, cherry, elm, linden, maple, cottonwood, willow. Leaves which are tough to break down include: birch, beach, hornbeam, oak, sweet chestnut, etc. The breakdown of leaves could be expedited by shredding them or mixing them with nitrogen-rich material.
- Leaves vary in acidity. High in calcium leaves grow on ash, cherry, elm, hawthorn, linden and maple. Low calcium leaves grow on conifers, beach, birch, hornbeam and oak. Applying shredded leaves or leaf compost to the soil may cause temporary acidity which affects the top inch of soil and in most cases do not effect plant growth. Acidic leaves and compost could be treated with lime which will neutralize the pH.
- Do not shred leaves which contain seeds of invasive species or weeds since using them may result in spreading of unwanted plants.
- When you shred or mulch move make sure that the leaves are dry.