To rake or not to rake, that is the question

Don't rake your leaves this fall and many helpful garden inhabitants will survive the winter more easily in your leafy habitat. On the other hand, if you rake, the lawn waste you collect now will make a beautiful stew for your compost.

Perhaps you've joined the composting trend initiated by Greener Bloomfield. If so, now is the time to collect the "browns" needed for good compost. Browns and greens are the two ingredients in a compost pile. Greens are kitchen scraps and grass; browns are fallen leaves. A good compost pile requires enough browns for use until next year's raking season — six to ten bags of leaves.

Whenever you add greens to the compost, add a comparable amount of browns. Other browns include shredded newspapers and straw (not industrial straw that may be filled with herbicides and pesticides).

According to the savvygardening.com, reasons to not rake your leaves or clean up a garden include offering a place for helpful insects to shelter.

- Some butterflies "overwinter" and a pile of leaves is a perfect nest.
- Ladybugs do a form of hibernation and leaves are a great home.
- Birds can find a meal of wintering insects in a pile of leaves.
- Many garden-friendly predator insects need a leafy habitat to survive the winter. They're already in the garden when winter ends, ready to police the pests that attack vegetables and flowers.

Learn more about composting and Greener Bloomfield. Meetings are held the first Thursday of every month at 7 p.m. at the Civic Center. Or go to Greenerbloomfield.org, or on facebook @greenerbloomfield.