Raking Up Fallen Leaves

It's Fall Y'all! Have you ever wondered why we call this season 'fall'? It is attributed to the 'falling' leaves. In other parts of the country, leaves might be falling off the trees for two months. But after two months, the trees are completely bare. In Louisiana, our leaf drop seems to last longer. We might be getting some now, but it will last all through the winter. So, what should you do with all those leaves?

The first answer is a simple one, yet, in my opinion, the least favorable one. Rake up fallen leaves and put them on the curb to be thrown away. Leaf debris can be home to pests, so getting rid of it might be a good idea. Yes, they won't be your problem anymore, but is this option sustainable? Putting loads of organic matter into a landfill, there's got to be something better. If you take care of your trees & you know they're no infested with any pests, here are some other options.

Chop up the leaves and add them to your compost pile. Over time, they will break down and add beneficial nutrients to your compost. But be warned, a pile of raked up leaves does not make a compost pile. A compost pile needs to have some "green" biomass. Kitchen scraps like coffee grounds, eggshells, vegetable scraps and fruit rinds all make up the "green" part of compost. So, chop up those leaves, mix them with your kitchen scraps, and you've got the beginnings of a compost pile. Be sure to mix it every few months, and by next year, you should have some rich compost to add to your garden beds.

Next option, chop up leaf debris and use it as a natural mulch around large trees. It will not only add organic matter to the soil around the tree, but it will be a place for beneficial insects to live through the winter.

Now, my last option, read carefully – run over the leaves with your lawn mower, and let them be a natural fertilizer for your lawn. DO NOT do this more than once or twice a year! Adding too much chopped up leaf debris to the lawn can keep your grass from nicely coming back in the spring. Too much of this can suffocate the roots and keep new blades of grass from emerging next year. Do this when you "don't have time" to rake them up, and only do it once or twice a season.

I have many memories of raking up leaves in the fall – it's a different type of leaf drop in Ohio than it is in Louisiana. But we have such a special climate here that we can compost our leaf debris and it will turn into rich organic matter much quicker here than in other parts of the country.

Written by John MacMillan