



Got leaves? Love' em and leave 'em

Leaves are a valuable natural resource! They contain 50-80% of the nutrients a plant extracts from the soil and air during the season. Therefore, leaves should be managed (i.e. recycled) and re-used rather than bagged and placed at curbside.

Mulching is really nature's idea. Nature produces large quantities of mulch all the time with fallen leaves, needles, twigs, pieces of bark, spent flower blossoms, fallen fruit and other organic material. Those materials then decompose and re-enter the soil thus providing valuable nutrients to living plants.

There are several ways to take advantage of your valuable leaf fertilizer and manage your yard waste. Here are a few of the ways:

- Allow mowed leaves to remain on your grass to conserve moisture through out the year. If the leaf fall is large, rake the leaves to space them out to prevent clogging the mower.



- Use the leaf bag on your mower to collect leaves to spread throughout your flowerbeds. Don't worry about the small amount of grass clippings collected as they cannot re-seed your flower bed with grass. A 2-3" layer of leaves conserves moisture, moderates soil temperature, provides good weed control, and returns valuable nutrients to the soil.
- New fall plantings or a new tree would benefit from a layer of shredded or mowed leaves. Generally, a 2-3" layer is adequate for plants and slightly deeper for trees. Just remember to keep the mulch a few inches away from the trunk or stems to avoid rot, decay and related diseases. Be careful not to use clippings from lawns that have been treated with herbicides as these may adversely affect sensitive plants.

Leaves may be collected and worked directly into garden and flowerbed soils. A 6-8" layer of leaves tilled into a heavy, clay soil will improve aeration and drainage. On the other hand, the same amount tilled into a light, sandy soil will improve water retention and nutrient holding capacity.

Your leaves can also be used as one of the ingredients of your compost bin. Many people who have tried composting love it and are hooked on its benefits (see links below).

Hopefully, more and more people will look at leaves in their yards in a more favorable way. And, you might even offer to take the neighbors' leaf bags to spread even more mulch and love!

For more information see these links -

[Types and benefits of mulch](#)

[Options for managing and using leaves](#)

[Mulching Garden Soils](#)

[Backyard Composting in Oklahoma](#)