

Autumn: Easiest Season to Begin Composting

Leaf Mold: Easiest Compost Ever



It's Autumn! If you've thought about composting but just haven't convinced yourself to begin, NOW is the best time to start, because it's the easiest time to start. Who doesn't love easy?

The other name for Autumn is...Fall. You can see it all around you. Those beautiful trees shading you in summer with their cooling leaves are now shedding those leaves, giving you a priceless gift. That gift is the free material for starting your compost.

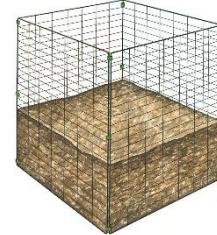


Shredded leaves

Lots of folks just rake their leaves. For composting, though, it's better to get your lawn mower out, put the bag on it and mow over the leaves. Find a corner of your yard that's not of much use to anyone or for anything. There's always a corner like that. You'll be making it into one of the best corners of your yard.

Empty the bag in that corner. Keep mowing those leaves and emptying the bag there. This is the beginning of your compost pile. In fact, it can be the end of your compost pile, too. Depends on how much effort you want to put into this endeavor.

A bit more tidy would be using a wire container to hold the leaves. These can be made easily just using a roll of hardware cloth (which is really not cloth, just a name for a type of fencing). Or you can purchase pre-made panels and assemble.



Pre-made wire panels

Get your hose out, too. As you empty the bagged leaves onto the pile, water them down. They don't have to be soaking wet, just damp. Mow, dump bag, water. Mow, dump bag, water. Get the kids out to help - they love to play in water. Expect to get wet yourself, though. Kids love to water adults, too. They laugh when they do it. Join the fun!

Two things here: why mow and why water? Good questions. The answer is threefold: Fungus, Bacteria, Invertebrates. The **F.B.I. of composting**. These decomposers feed on the organic matter in your compost pile. The smaller the pieces, the easier to consume, the more the decomposers can multiply, and the faster they can turn the organic matter into compost. So, mow, mow, mow.

Decomposers do their best work in damp conditions. Keep your pile damp and the decomposers thrive. Take the water away and the decomposers die. **Dry=die**.

If you want, you can stop here with building your compost pile. If you do, though, you'll ideally want pick a nice day every couple of weeks and aerate your pile. This adds oxygen that decomposers need. How do you aerate? Take your garden fork, stab it into the pile and twist. Do this in quite a few places. Or use the fork to mix the pile up a bit. Take your hose or a watering can with you to make sure the pile stays damp, too. Remember, decomposers need water. And they need oxygen to thrive as well.

Food, water, air. Sounds like what humans need, doesn't it? In fact, all living creatures need these, including your decomposers. Keep them happy and they will do a great job for you.

If you add nothing more to your pile, in 8-12 months you'll have a rich, crumbly, brown material with a pleasant earthy scent. Gardeners call this leaf mold and gardeners love leaf mold. It holds up to 500% of its weight in water. You can use it as a mulch in your perennial beds and your vegetable gardens or around your shrubs. You can even incorporate it into new garden beds.

Using leaf mold over time, even just as a mulch, improves the texture of your soil, increases its water retention ability, and increases the beneficial microbes in the soil. The added organic material also attracts earth worms and all manner of beneficial invertebrates which boost the water-holding capacity and the health of your soil. All of this helps your plants grow better, stronger, and healthier.

Better, stronger, healthier plants. Isn't that what gardening is all about?

Want more information about leaf mold?

[Leaf Mold--University of Wisconsin](#)