



leaveleavesalone.org

A Wasteful Practice...

The annual ritual of raking, blowing, piling, bagging, and trucking leaves out of residential neighborhoods costs each homeowner – or their landscaper – hours of time each fall. It also robs the yards of one of nature's greatest resources: rich, natural compost. The practice of leaf blowing causes serious diesel and particulate matter pollution, especially with the use of 2-stroke backpack leaf blowers so commonly used in suburban backyards. There are alternatives and they'll save you time AND money

Environmentally Friendly Alternatives...

A more sustainable way of managing leaves involves mulching or mulch-mowing. Mulching helps to limit the negative impacts associated with leaf blowers. Mulching is easy to learn and easy to do whether a homeowner or professional. More and more landscapers and homeowners are switching from blowing leaves to mulching them. Mulch mowing can save municipalities (and taxpayers) tens of thousands of dollars, by avoiding the necessity of municipal collection.

The Benefits of Leaf Mulching

Leave mulching reduces noise and greenhouse gases, because it reduces the use of leaf blowers; in an added bonus, it also enhances the health of your yard by creating valuable compost, which enriches the topsoil. Leaf mulching avoids the spreading dust and contaminants into the air and saves you time and money.

The benefits of leaf mulching are numerous. Mulching improves soil structure, reduces the need for fertilizer and avoids water pollution by reducing phosphorus and fertilizer leaching.

Mulching reduces the safety hazard of piled up or bagged leaves on the road-sides and saves taxpayer money for municipal leaf collection.

Mulch, when spread on garden beds, suppresses weeds and improves soil quality and when it decomposes into compost, it suppresses disease.

By adding organic matter to the soil, leaf mulching improves water retention and percolation, for improved rain water management.

Additional organic matter loosens the soil allowing grass roots to penetrate more deeply, improving grass health.

Save Money!

To add a 2" layer of mulch to a 40 x 4 ft plant bed you need one cubic yard of mulch. One cubic yard of mulch delivered to your home costs about \$30; plus a delivery charge. Mulch in plastic bags, sold at the store, is even more expensive and less environmentally friendly. Leaf mulch is an inexpensive mulch that you already have available. Leaf mulch is not treated with chemical preservatives or paints and it decomposes more quickly than wood mulch into healthy soil.

Other Ways to Manage Leaves

Pile The Leaves: Not a fan of the mowing idea? Pile the leaves somewhere where they won't be disturbed and leave them alone. Raking leaves onto a tarp to move the leaves can be much more efficient than blowing leaves with a leaf blower across a yard. (This will eliminate annoying the neighbors with leaf blower noise and avoid generating toxic fumes and polluting the air with particulate matter.)

Shred Them: To make your pile of leaves decompose more quickly, you can shred the leaves with either a leaf shredder, or a chipper/shredder. You can also pass over leaves with a lawn mower, or put them in a garbage bin and mulch them with a weed whacker. This is really good when you don't have much space as it will reduce the volume of your leaf pile to about one tenth of its original size. Shredding leaves this way speeds up decomposition: if you do this in the fall, you can expect to have compost by mid-summer the following year.

Vacuum Them: Suitable for small areas, leaf vacuums allow you to gather the leaves and shred them at the same time. Add them to a compost pile, or place them onto perennial beds and around shrubs as protective mulch. This mulch decomposes and enriches the soil.

Use Them As Insulation: Shred the leaves into small pieces and place them on your flower beds as mulch for winter protection. If they haven't broken down by spring, remove them (piling them in a compost pile) to allow any tender plants to emerge or leave them and they'll keep weeds down in the growing season.

How to Use Compost: Compost enriches soil — it's like vitamins, combined with pre- and probiotics for the soil. You can add it to flower and vegetable beds, plant pots, window boxes, around shrubs and trees and as enrichment to grass lawns.

Leave Leaves Alone is part of the Healthy Yards Campaign

Healthy Yards is an organization committed to help people change from harmful yard practices, which produce greenhouse gases and endanger wildlife, to healthy yard practices, that do exactly the opposite. Healthy Yards offers healthier alternatives so that we can build healthy ecosystems in our back yards that support bees, butterflies, birds and more. For more healthy yard practices please visit: Healthy Yards www.healthyyards.org

Frequently asked Questions about Leaf Blowing

Why is it important to mulch leaves?

Leaf blowers cause noise, diesel pollution and destroy valuable topsoil. And removing leaves from your property is a waste of a natural resource that you can use.

Why should we stop leaf blowing?

Leaf blowing is very inefficient. In communities where the town picks up leaves, residents (or their landscapers) spend hundreds of man hours blowing and raking leaves to get them to the roadside waiting for pick up. Before the town trucks come round many leaves blow right back onto the yard — or their neighbor's yard!

Leaf blowing erodes topsoil. It's not just the leaves being blown, but the topsoil, necessary for healthy plant growth. The topsoil can contain fungi, dog feces and other materials and chemicals that can be harmful when they become airborne and we breathe them in.

Why is leaf mulching better for the environment?

When leaves are left in piles on hard surfaces they release phosphorous as they decompose. This ends up in our ponds, waterways and reservoirs creating a perfect environment for algae bloom, which causes water contamination. State law requires municipalities to pick up leaves within four weeks but science shows that the phosphorous is released far sooner than that. (When leaves decompose when mulched on lawns, phosphorus is not a problem as it is not concentrated and it is actually an important nutrient for plants, encouraging root development.)

Is leaf mulch safe to use in the garden?

When you use your own leaves to mulch your beds you know that they are disease free. Commercial mulch is usually made from trees that have to come down for a reason — and who knows the reason? When you bring mulch onto your property you risk importing disease or harmful insects.