

Seven different uses for fallen leaves

By the time autumn hits full swing, many trees will have shed their leaves for the season, and the last vestiges of red, yellow and orange magic will have faded to brown. Raking, blowing and collecting leaves be-

comes the primary chores of lawn and yard maintenance, and presents most homeowners with large piles of gathered leaves to tend to.

It is impossible to count just how many leaves fall to the ground each year, or just how many pounds of leaves get collected curbside, but the numbers are substantial. Cleaning up leaves is considerable work, but not all of those leaves need to be carted away. In fact, there are several different uses of leaves that can be beneficial.

1. Spread leaves as a protective mulch to cover tender perennials or root crops/bulbs in the ground. The leaves will form a natural insulating cover that keeps the soil and the plants within a bit warmer over winter.
2. Create a pile of leaves that will break down and form a crumbly, compost-

like material called leaf mold. Even though leaf mold may sound like a blight, it's actually a good amendment to garden soil, improving its structure and ability to hold water. Leaf mold also attracts beneficial organisms that are vital in healthy soil.

3. Brown leaves can be added to green materials in compost piles to improve the health of the compost being formed. According to the healthy living resource Care2, the ideal ratio is 75 percent brown to 25 percent green materials in compost. Turn compost piles regular-

ly to aerate them.

4. Store dried, mulched leaves in a dry spot so they can be used in the spring as a weed barrier for spring plantings. They will keep weeds at bay and help retain soil moisture to ensure small sprouts have the resources to grow.

5. Use shredded leaves as a lawn supplement. Pass a lawn mower over leaves left on the lawn to break them down into pieces too small to rake. This will help keep the lawn healthy throughout the winter without blocking out needed sunlight.
6. Bag dried leaves and

pack them tightly together in cold areas of the home, such as basements or garages. They can act as added insulation. Bags of leaves also can be placed around planting containers to protect them from frost.

7. Gather a few of the best-looking leaves and preserve them. Use an iron on a low setting and press leaves between two pieces of waxed paper until the waxed paper seals together. Or use clear contact paper to achieve the same effect.

Fallen leaves can be used in many different ways throughout the year.



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Fall lawn care tips

Spring and summer may be the seasons most often associated with landscaping and lawn care, but tending to lawns and gardens is a year-round job. If lawn and garden responsibilities dip considerably in winter, then fall is the last significant chance before the new year that homeowners will have to address the landscaping around their homes.

Fall lawn care differs from spring and summer lawn care, even if the warm temperatures of summer linger into autumn. Homeowners who want their lawns to thrive year-round can take advantage of the welcoming weather of fall to address any existing or potential issues.

- Keep mowing, but adjust how you mow. It's important that homeowners continue to mow their lawns so long as grass is growing. But as fall transitions into winter, lower the blades so the grass is cut shorter while remaining mindful that no blade of grass should ever be trimmed by more than one-third. Lowering the blades will allow more sunlight to reach the grass in the months ahead.

- Remove leaves as they fall. Much like apple-picking and foliage, raking leaves is synonymous with fall. Some homeowners may wait to pick up a rake until all of the trees on their properties are bare. However, allowing fallen leaves to sit on the ground for extended periods of time can have an adverse

effect on grass. Leaves left to sit on the lawn may ultimately suffocate the grass by forming an impenetrable wall that deprives the lawn of sunlight and oxygen. The result is dead grass and possibly even fungal disease. Leaves may not need to be raked every day, but homeowners should periodically rake and remove leaves from their grass, even if there are plenty left to fall still hanging on the trees.

- Repair bald spots. Summer exacts a toll on lawns in various ways, and even homeowners with green thumbs may end up with a lawn filled with bald spots come September. Autumn is a great time to repair these bald spots. Lawn repair mixes like Scotts® PatchMaster contain mulch, seed and fertilizer to repair bald spots, which can begin to recover in as little as seven days. Before applying such products, remove dead grass and

loosen the top few inches of soil. Follow any additional manufacturer instructions as well.

- Aerate the turf. Aeration reduces soil compacting, facilitating the delivery of fertilizer and water to a lawn's roots. While many homeowners, and particularly those who take pride in tending to their own lawns, can successfully aerate their own turf, it's best to first have soil tested so you know which amendments to add after the ground has been aerated. Gardening centers and home improvement stores sell soil testing kits that measure the pH of soil, but homeowners who want to test for nutrients or heavy metals in their soil may need to send their samples to a lab for further testing.

Fall lawn care provides a great reason to spend some time in the yard before the arrival of winter.



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