

Make Your Leaves Work for You



When autumn comes to a forest and the leaves drop to the ground, assorted fungi and bacteria will help to transform leaves into a rich dark mold which feeds the trees again in years to follow. You can learn from this natural process and put it to good use in your garden. There are several ways you can use your leaves.

Compost Your Leaves

Leaves are rich in carbon, minerals and fibre. A healthy compost pile requires materials rich in both carbon and nitrogen. To maintain a healthy balance in your pile, especially in winter when most materials going into the compost pile are nitrogen-rich kitchen waste, keep a supply of leaves by your bin. Add equal volumes of leaves and kitchen waste to your compost pile.

Build a Leaf Compost Pile

Build a separate compost pile for leaves only. A wood and wire compost bin can be made easily at home. Plans are available by calling the Compost Helpline at (416)392-4689. To accelerate the composting process and substantially reduce the volume of leaves, shred them in a garbage can with an electric lawn trimmer, run a lawnmower over the leaves, or use a commercial chipper/shredder.

Alternate six inches of leaves with a one inch layer of soil and wet the pile to the dampness of a well wrung-out sponge. Cover the leaves with a final layer of soil.

In the spring, when the leaves have thawed, mix in an equal volume of food waste and a few shovelfuls of soil. During the summer, check the pile occasionally and water when dry. The leaves should turn into a rich, dark compost by the fall.

Try Alternative Composting Methods

Place shredded leaves and handfuls of soil in garbage bags, moisten the mixture and close the bags. Once a week, shake the bags to mix the leaves and hasten their decomposition. By spring you should have leaf mold in the bags which can be dug into the garden or used as a top dressing.

Use Your Leaves as Mulch

Mulch is a layer of material which covers the soil surface. You can use your leaves as a mulch on your vegetable garden or flower beds.

Fall and Winter:

In the fall and winter, mulch insulates your garden and prevents frost from damaging the flower beds. Apply at least six inches of leaves for best results.

Spring and Summer:

Save some leaves for use in the spring. As a spring and summer mulch, the leaves will conserve soil moisture, keep plant roots cool in the hot sun, and control erosion. The leaves will also add organic matter and nutrients to the soil.

Know Your Leaves

Walnut, butternut and black locust leaves should be treated with caution when used as a mulch or compost. They contain a substance which is toxic to many plants, called juglone. After a year of composting, the juglone breaks down and the compost can be used safely. For this reason, you may choose to compost these leaves separately.

This material was adapted from the Seattle Tilth Association, the Seattle Solid Waste Utility and the Recycling Council of Ontario.

Profile:

Provincial Tweedsmuir History Curator

Myrtle Stone was born in Guelph in 1923, the eighth child of Sidney and Edith Meier. Her family moved to Simcoe in Norfolk County in 1929. After graduating from school, Myrtle worked as a secretary in a



wholesale grocery firm until she married Frank Stone in 1946. Myrtle is the mother of three children - Karen, Katherine and Bruce - and a grandmother of three.

Later Myrtle worked as Secretary-Treasurer for the Woodhouse Township School Area and the Township Committee of Adjustment. She was also Secretary of the West Lynn Public School in Simcoe for a number of years. Myrtle was the first woman to serve as a School Trustee for the Woodhouse Township School Area, and served in this capacity until the Norfolk County Board of Education was organized. Presently, Myrtle is serving her fourth term as Director of the Norfolk Association for Community Living.

Myrtle has been a Women's Institute member for 38 years. She has held offices at Branch, District and Area levels, as well as being Board Director at the provincial level for Subdivision 20 for three years. Myrtle is a Life Member of the Woodhouse WI and the Norfolk South District. She is also a member of the local committee of the Adelaide Hunter Hoodless Homestead. And this fall, Myrtle will be completing her fourth year as Curator.

Beyond her Women's Institute involvement, Myrtle led 21 4-H Clubs and served as a Pioneer Girls Leader and Sunday School Teacher in her church. As well, she was Church Secretary for many years. And in her spare time, Myrtle states: "I enjoy embroidery, knitting, tatting and reciting poetry ..."