

Composting Leaves

By
Scott Hininger
University of Wyoming Extension
Sheridan County

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Most gardens and flower beds are short of organic material and the more leaves that can be incorporated into these area now will really pay off next spring. It always amazes me at the amount of decomposition which happens to leaves over the winter. You do not have to get them all the way incorporated, if there is some soil touching the leaves this will start the decomposition process.

Trees benefit us in many ways, although we may not think their leaves are very useful in the fall! Leaf raking may not be your favorite fall activity, but it is an important one. Not only can we get some good exercise and it gives us the opportunity to check to see how the yard is doing this time of year. It is a good opportunity to check the health of our trees. If the leaves stay on the ground through the winter, they could pack down and smother the grass beneath. Leaf raking can be made easier by using the proper tool. Make sure your rake has a handle that is long enough so you do not have to stoop as you work. Dry leaves rake up easier than wet ones, which tend to stick to the grass. You can also use most mowers to pick the leaves up.

The leaves you rake up are not valueless. One year's litter from a single full-grown tree is worth at least \$20.00 as fertilizer and humus. Pound for pound, the leaves from Oaks, Maples and Elms contain twice as much calcium, phosphorus and magnesium as manure does. You can make good compost from the fallen leaves in a large, dark-colored garbage bag. Place a four-inch layer of leaves on the bottom. Follow this with an inch-layer of soil. Scatter a handful of a complete garden fertilizer (i.e., 10-10-10) over the soil. Repeat the layering process until the bag is nearly full. Sprinkle the materials with 2 quarts of water. Seal the bag. By next spring, you should have compost. There are many compost containers available. The other item to be aware of is if the tree or shrub is diseased or has diseased leaves, then these leaves really do need to be removed from around the tree so as not to spread the disease again next year. Most of our leaf diseases and some insects are spread this way and we can really help cut back on the severity or amount showing up on the trees and shrubs by eliminating them. Complete composting will generally eliminate the disease if the temperature gets high enough. However, if the leaves have not gone through the composting process thoroughly, you could spread the disease around with the compost. In addition, these leaf diseases are pretty much host specific. Which means the diseased leaves from your aspen will not affect your evergreens, garden plants and your flowers.

In addition, we need to remember that most cities have composting and they do not charge you to bring your leaves or other organic materials to the landfill and we really do not want this put into the dumpsters, which fills our landfill needlessly. If you do not use the leaves

then take them to the landfill for composting. Compost does many good things for our soils whether it is in the flowerbed or the garden. Compost provides organic matter to the soil, which is lacking in Wyoming, and by adding lots of organic material to our soils, this will solve many plant problems and really benefit our perennials to help them reach their full potential.

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