



LEAF GOLD

Fabulous Uses for this Free Resource!

Colorful, fall shade tree and shrub leaves grace our lawns, gardens and roadways every year as the plants prepare for a long winter's rest. In the United States, many of us have fallen into a habit of thinking of this abundant resource as a nuisance.

Many communities spend precious taxpayer dollars to transport thousands of truckloads of fall leaves to landfills. In the best of circumstances, landfills compost the leaves for residents to come back and retrieve them the following growing season. In worst cases the leaves add to landfills or clog our stormwater systems increasing the likelihood of seasonal, flash flooding. However...

Shade tree and shrub leaves are actually filled with the nutrients that your landscape, lawn and gardens need!



There's a better, easy way, even if you're not an avid gardener, to use these leaves on your property to save money, to reduce waste, to increase the health of your soil, the nutritional value of any vegetables you grow and to reduce community flooding by helping to prevent the clogging of storm drains. Three of the easiest ways to turn leaves into leaf mulch and compost, or as I say, "leaf gold" are as follows:

- **LEAF CAGE = LEAF COMPOST:** This is an easy way to use, instead of dispose of, your leaves. This method takes 1-3 years, with little effort, to create a rich leaf compost.
- **SHRED & SPREAD:** The second method creates an immediate supply of leaf mulch that protects your plantings through the winter as well as feeds your lawn and gardens for abundant growth next year.
- **CRUSH & BAG 'EM:** This third method creates a dark, loamy, leaf compost, sometimes as early as the following springtime.

Making our world a healthier place, one home at a time.

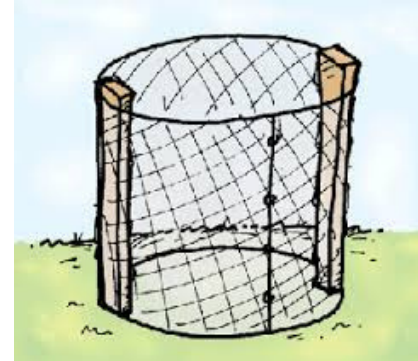
Healthy Home Habitats - 603-313-9153 - michele.chalice@gmail.com



OPTION ONE: LEAF CAGE to LEAF COMPOST

What You Need:

- A roll of 2" Chicken/Poultry Wire, approx. \$10
- 1" x 2" x 3' tall Pine/Oak Grading Stakes (12-Pack), approx. \$20
- A 5-lb Sledgehammer, can be a 5lb/small one
- 6-10 Twisty Ties from vegetables or small zip-ties
- A Household Stepladder



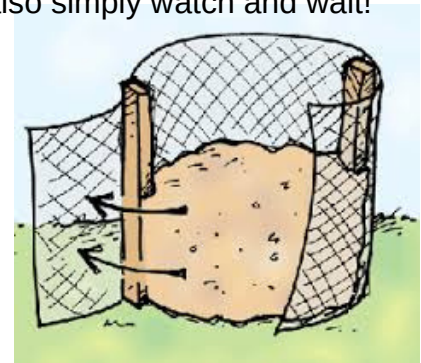
Wire Leaf Cage
urbanfoodgarden.org

What To Do:

1. Use a sledgehammer to pound in one stake in an area that receives sun and rain as well as some shelter.
2. Cut and roll approx. 10' of the chicken wire into a circle around the stake and attach the ends with twisty-ties or small zip ties.
3. Pound in an additional stakes inside this circle for stability.
4. Dump fall leaves into the enclosure. Climb in and stomp on these leaves to allow for more leaves as they will shrink when decomposing to less than half the original size.
5. Mix with pitchfork monthly for quickest results but you can also simply watch and wait!

When Will It Be Ready?

Like magic, in 1-3 years you'll have a wonderful supply of dark, rich and terrific leaf mulch/compost. This material is ideal for layering around plants and top-dressing a garden.



Advantages to this method:

The resulting leaf mulch or compost (depending on how much it has decomposed) is a free, fabulous soil amendment of nutrients uniquely appropriate for the plants/leaves that you have used (cycling nutrients), offering the following benefits to your landscape & garden areas:

- Essential nutrients and beneficial mycorrhizae, super-charging the soil,
- Moderation of soil temperatures from sub-zero, winter temperature drops & summer heat spikes,
- Retention of soil moisture for plants' use, less drying-out during periods of less rain,
- Reduction of weeds due to smothering of weed seeds; and because of increased moisture, necessary weeding is easier,
- Sustainable, organic material to grow healthy plants and nutritious food w/ less fuel and impact!

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OPTION TWO: SHRED & SPREAD

What You Need:

- Lawn Mower set at its highest (tallest) setting
- Leaf Rake
- Fall leaves spread out on: your sidewalk, and/or your lawn, and/or your perennial garden.



What To Do:

1. Mow over the leaves with your lawn mower several times until they are shredded with or without your mower bag. An additional option is to use a weed whipper in a metal garbage can. Both methods increase the leaf surface area for increased, healthy, fungal growth.
2. Spread the shredded leaves in a uniform "blanket" over your vegetable or garden beds, at the base of all of your shrubs and shade trees and on your turf areas with the caveats below.



When Will It Be Ready? Immediately!

Cautions:

- TURF - mow only a light layer of leaves into your turfgrass. This will add organic material and feed your turf nutrients without smothering the turfgrass.
- PERENNIALS - place leaf mulch around, *not on top of* perennial plants; this prevents smothering.

Advantages to this method:



This method takes the most time. however the resulting leaf mulch is available immediately:

- Adding essential nutrients, organic material & beneficial mycorrhizae; super-charging the soil below,
- Protecting plants from increasing, winter sub-zero temperature drops & drying winter winds.
- Reducing the amount of next season's weeds through the smothering of weed seeds.

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OPTION THREE: CRUSH & BAG 'EM

What You Need:

- Contractor, Black Plastic Bags
- Garden Pitchfork for making holes
- Water Spigot and Garden Hose
- Milorganite Fertilizer (slow release)



What To Do:

1. Determine a sheltered and shaded location near the garden bed/s where you will use the leaf compost as the finished bags will be very heavy.
2. Stuff each bag with as many leaves as possible; stomp inside each bag to crush its leaves as you're filling them. Add a 1/2 cup of Milorganite (a high nitrogen, slow release fertilizer) or two shovels of fresh or "hot" animal manure.
3. Fill each bag again and stamp the leaves down until the bag is full of crushed leaves.
4. Roll bag around to mix the contents.
5. Use a garden hose to soak the entire bag of leaves, top to bottom, all around inside.
6. Use a garden pitchfork to make several small holes in the bottom of each bag.
7. Tie each bag's tops closed.

When Will It Be Ready?

After the contents have broken down in 6-12 months. However, turning the bags every week and leaving the bags in a heated garage will decrease the time needed for the leaves to decompose.

Advantages to this method:

This method creates leaf compost -a free, dark, rich, soil amendment, which offers the following benefits in your landscape and garden areas with minimal effort adding:

- Essential nutrients and beneficial mycorrhizae, super-charging the soil below,
- An appropriate and sustainable source of organic material which increases the soils' nutrients: for vegetable and other plants in your garden beds, for amending soil when transplanting shrubs and trees and if sifted, and for a seed starter mix.

Additional Information Links:

- **Fall Leaves - Put Them to Work in your Landscape with Bag Composting** - <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/smallfarms/fall-leaves-put-them-work-your-landscape-bag-composting>
- **Everything You Know About Composting is Wrong: Mike McGrath at TEDxPhoenixville** - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n9OhxKlrWwc>

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