



Composting Leaves

Before you bag up those fall leaves, consider their potential for your landscape.

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Compost bins with easy access for turning the pile

The leaves of one large shade tree can be worth as much as \$50 of plant food and humus. Pound for pound, the leaves of most trees contain twice as many minerals as manure. For example, the mineral content of a sugar maple leaf is over five percent, while even common pine needles have 2.5 percent of their weight in calcium, magnesium, nitrogen and

phosphorus, plus other trace elements.

Composting your leaves is quite simple and doesn't require any expensive bins or tumblers, just a good mix and time. Your compost pile can be any size and can be loose or fenced in with some chicken wire, just make sure you can access it from one side to turn your pile every so often. Turning your pile will allow oxygen to help the decomposition process.

Start with a 6 inch layer of leaves, shredded or not, and then add a two inch layer of something green that contains more nitrogen such as manure, grass clipping, green weeds, or vegetable waste from the kitchen. If you don't have green waste, then add a little nitrogen such as dried blood, cottonseed meal, or bone meal. You can also

spread a little native soil between the layers which will add some bacteria, fungi and other organisms that will help decompose the organic waste. Turn your pile every three weeks or sooner if you want. If you turn the pile three or four times before spring, you can have some fine compost ready for spring planting.

Once you have compost, use it in your garden or landscape by incorporating into planting soils or topdressing a planting bed or garden. The compost will improve soil structure, loosening compacted clay soils that have trouble draining or helping sandy soils hold moisture and nutrients.

More information

- [Home Composting: A Guide for Home Gardeners](#)

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