



Fall leaves are more than just colorful

Children are planning Halloween costumes, pumpkins and haybales are decorating many yards and there is a bit of a chill in the air. You know what that means ... fall has arrived. With the arrival of fall, Oklahomans also are noticing more color in the landscape as the leaves on the trees turn vibrant orange, red and yellow.

However, when the leaves fall, homeowners must find something to do with that yard full of colorful leaves.

Fortunately, these leaves can be a great asset for your landscape. While it may be tempting to just rake them into piles and bag them, resist that temptation. Bagged leaves won't do anything but take up valuable space in the landfill. Instead, use them to your advantage.

Leaves can be used as mulch. Just rake some of them into your perennial beds where they'll keep plants cozy that are overwintering. You won't need a lot of leaves for this.

Another option is to mulch them with the lawn mower. Homeowners have a couple of options in this scenario. First, capture the leaves in the bag attachment and use the chopped leaves as mulch in flower beds. The second option, and the easiest, is to remove the bag attachment and mow normally. The chopped up leaves are returned to the lawn and provide valuable organic matter and nutrients to the soil. Be sure to note let the leaves pile up too much before mowing.

Gathered whole or chopped leaves can be scattered over a fallow garden bed then tilled or turned into the soil, which will break down over winter providing additional organic matter. For those homeowners who have a compost pile, add whole or chopped leaves. Next spring you'll have some great organic material to incorporate into flower and vegetable beds. You don't need a special compost bin to accomplish this process. A big hole dug behind the garage or some other inconspicuous place works nicely. Fill the hole with lots of leaves and other garden plant material. You also can add kitchen waste such as fruit and vegetable peels. Do not add meat or fat.

If your landscape has a lot of trees, consider buying or renting a vacuum-shredder. These tools suck up the leaves, chop them and dispense them into a bag. Keep in mind this process works well only when the leaves are dry. If the leaves are wet, they'll just clog the machine.

If you own a wooded area or large property where you can dispose of leaves, this is a good option. Just like in your garden beds, the leaves make good mulch and winter cover. However, remember too many leaves can suffocate existing plants, so be sure to spread them out a bit.

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