

## **Don't Kick 'em to the Curb**

Ahhhhhhh! The beauty of fall colors is upon us! This time of year, the gold, red, purple, and orange mix into a beautiful palette unmatched in nature. Just at the peak, leaves start falling. At first it is slow, but quickly these magnificent leaves become a problem for our lawns.

What do you do with your fall leaves? If you are like many people, you spend a good amount of your free time bagging your fall leaves to put at the curb. These bagged leaves often end up in landfills. Did you know there are alternatives to bagging that are healthier for your lawn and better for your wallet?

## **Mulch 'em, Mow 'em, Stick 'em in the Compost**

An easy way to provide free mulch for around your landscaping plants and garden is to use your lawn mower to do the work for you! Simply use a lawn mower with an attached bag to gather and chop up your leaves into smaller sized pieces. Remember to mulch on a dry day, wet leaves do not mulch well. Mulched leaves provide beneficial nutrients, like carbon and nitrogen, which help plants grow. A thick layer of mulched leaves\* around your plants will help suppress weed growth while adding organic matter to the soil. Just like other forms of mulch, mulched leaves help retain soil moisture, reduce soil compaction, and improve water infiltration.

If you have more leaves than you can use on your landscaping, consider mixing mulched leaves\* in with your [compost](#). Compost is a great way to build up your soil while providing nutrients to your plants. Composting requires water, oxygen, and microscopic organisms like bacteria which work together overtime to break down organic matter. Fallen leaves are dry and contain a high level of carbon so it is important to add food scraps or grass clippings to introduce water and a source of nitrogen into the compost. Turning compost regularly with a shovel or by turning a [barrel style compost bin](#) increases oxygen and shortens the time it takes to break down plant matter. Over time, 3-6 months, you will have usable compost.

Want to give up bagging all together, even lawn mower bagging? Use the [mulch setting on your lawn mower](#) and add free nutrients directly back to your lawn. The mulch setting will cut the leaves into tiny pieces which will fall into the spaces between grass blades and break down, building up your soil while providing extra nutrients for a healthy lawn.

Mulch 'em, mow' em, or stick 'em in your compost to keep leaves on your property, out of landfills, and off paved areas. Lawn debris can clog storm sewer drains and lead to local flooding issues!

\*Certain trees produce a natural chemical defense to inhibit neighboring plant growth. This type of defense is called allelopathy. The leaves from black walnut, and to a lesser extent, hickory, should not be added as mulch or compost for this reason.

### **Suggested Social Media Text**

#### ***Remember...***

Mulched leaves provide beneficial nutrients for your turf and garden plants and help suppress weed growth. They add organic matter to the soil which helps retain soil moisture, reduce soil compaction, and improve water infiltration.

***So, don't kick them to the curb where they become a problem...leave them on the lawn!***

### **References and Resources:**

UKY Extension video - barrel style compost bin <https://extension.ca.uky.edu/file/home-food-waste-composting-resource-recovery>

HO-75 Home composting <http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/ho/ho75/ho75.pdf>

IP-70 Managing Household waste: Preventing, reusing, recycling, and composting <http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/ip/ip70/ip70.pdf>

UKY Extension video on mulching lawn leaves <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pVTY4BhsBz4>