

# Leave the Leaves Be!

The Ohio Chapter International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) is committed to advancing responsible tree care practices through research, technology, and education while promoting the benefits of trees. We remind those who own and manage trees that their fallen autumn leaves should be left alone or mowed to improve plant health and vitality.

Why should the leaves be allowed to remain on the ground near your trees and not rake them away?

Leaves represent energy. While they are green and on a tree, they are making food for the tree through photosynthesis. When fallen leaves start to decay, they transform into another energy source, one that is absorbed by the soil through natural decomposition, which then becomes available to trees through their roots.

The leaves are a natural habitat for butterflies, salamanders, chipmunks, box turtles, toads, shrews, earthworms, and others. By providing a habitat, you increase the population of beneficial insects for gardening season. When leaves are removed from the yard, automatically you are decreasing beneficial insects that are a great benefit to your yard the next growing season. Add leaves as a mulch to decompose or till into the soil to add organic matter and nutrients. Organic matter in soils will help regulate soil moisture and help trees weather drought conditions. Yard size and the amount of deciduous trees that are in your yard will determine the hours it will take to rake. One thing is for certain that you can spend hours and often a weekly chore until all leaves have fallen.

## Ways to Leave the Leave Be



**Composting Leaves**—Fallen leaves are an excellent addition to established compost piles or bins. They can also be composted on their own. The resulting compost has no odor of decay and once added to soil, will disintegrate further which enriches the soils naturally. The final composted product is water-soluble and is taken up by tree roots and used as energy by the tree. In nature, this cycle is repeated each year and this is how rich productive topsoil is made by nature.

Leaf Mold can easily be made by placing fallen leaves in a large pile, sprinkling them with water, and then letting them sit until next spring. The leaves will then decompose over the winter. Once spring arrives, use the leaf mold to increase soil viability and productivity naturally by the release of the stored energy from last years leaves.



Mulch the leaves with a mower and spread them as leaf mulch on your beds or over your lawn. This is the preferred option because the nutrients and organic matter will benefit the lawn and soil. Successfully mulching leaves into a lawn canopy requires more frequent mowing in the fall and possibly several passes with the mower to mulch the leaves sufficiently. Research shows that leaves collected from a variety of tree species mulched into established turfgrass resulted in fewer common dandelions (*Taraxacum officinale* W).



There are over 1,000 qualified tree experts in the state of Ohio that have been designated by the International Society of Arboriculture as ISA Certified Arborists®. To find an ISA Certified Arborist in your area, visit [www.Trees4Ohio.org](http://www.Trees4Ohio.org).

*Written/Designed by M. Webber and K. Hernandez*

