



Question of the Week

Q. What can I do with all the fall leaves I've raked up?

A. Think of them as a valuable horticultural resource—gardener's gold—that can help condition your garden soil, while reducing the volume of your yard waste by 75 percent. Two handy ways to recycle your leaves:

Compost them in large enclosures long and wide enough to accommodate a leaf pile three or feet high. Use chicken wire, recycled pallets, or another readily available material. Shred the leaves with a lawn mower or leaf grinder. Mix a nitrogen source like urea, blood meal or soy meal into the leaves as you add them to the pile. Leaves are high in carbon but comparatively low in nitrogen, needed to feed the decomposing bacteria. Moisture is essential for decomposition, so moisten each layer of leaves as you add them to the pile. Piles should be moist, but not soggy. Don't turn compost piles in the fall, to retain the heat that will keep the decomposition process going through our long New Hampshire winter. In spring, turn the leaf pile every three weeks or so until the leaves have broken down to a fine-textured, sweet-smelling compost ready to use on your lawn or garden.

Use shredded leaves as mulch. Shredding the leaves first helps keep leaf mulch from blowing away, improves its permeability to rainfall, and hastens its decomposition by soil microorganisms. Don't spread the leaf mulch thickly over the crowns of herbaceous perennial plants, which can lead to root rot.

Got questions? UNH Cooperative Extension's Family, Home & Garden Education Center Info Line offers practical help finding answers for your lawn and garden questions. Call toll free at 1-877-398-4769, M-F, 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., or e-mail us at answers@unh.edu