

Wider Benefits

Community Leaf Composting

You can do achieve even more if you get together with others for a big leaf tidy in your community, or offer to help elderly residents or people without cars by creating facilities where people can drop off leaves for composting. All it takes is a few willing volunteers and an out of the way space where they can rot down. The finished product could be used in public planters or beds to mulch or re-invigorate existing soil or compost, or be donated or sold to local gardeners.

School Leaf Composting

If your school has a lot of leaves to deal with, why not turn leaf composting into a practical learning opportunity? It is a fun way for children to get active and learn about recycling, soil biology, food science and PSHE.

Getting the children bag up leaves in bin liners and making them available to the community to take away and compost themselves is an excellent way to build community links, support local growers and dispose of waste material.

More Information

You can find more information on how to make leaf compost on the following websites – search for leafmould.

www.gardenorganic.org.uk/leafmould

www.rhs.org.uk/advice

www.bbc.co.uk/gardening/basics



Growing Durham Guide to Leaf Composting



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Growing Durham is a Food Durham Project, hosted by Durham Community Action.



About leaf compost

Fallen autumn leaves can be a nuisance, but they can also be a valuable resource for gardeners when turned into leaf compost (or leafmould). Whilst low in nutrients, the unique micro-organisms in leaf compost aerate the soil and help plants make use of what is available.

Leaf Compost is:

- * Free and easy to make
- * a great peat alternative or mulch
- * good for your plants
- * clean and easy to handle
- * suitable for using at any time of year

Young leaf compost (1-2 years old)

Use as a mulch around shrubs, herbaceous perennials, trees and veg

Well rotted leaf compost (2-3 years old)

Use as above, or mix with:

- * equal parts of sharp sand and garden compost to make a seed sowing medium
- * equal parts sharp sand, loam and garden compost for a potting compost mix.

What kind of leaves can we use?

All deciduous leaves can be used to make Leaf Compost – these are the leaves that fall in the autumn which are brown and look dead e.g. beech, oak, ash, sycamore etc. All will rot down eventually although some will take longer than others. Avoid evergreen leaves such as holly, conifers or ivy.

Collect fallen leaves from your garden, driveway and local pavements and quiet streets (although please take care and watch out for litter and dog mess).

How to make it

Collect them up

It is easy to gather up leaves that collect in corners using a rake or some sheets of cardboard as scoops. If you have a mower with a box you can use it to collect the leaf litter from your lawn. Shredding helps the Leaf Compost to rot down more quickly.

Don't disturb drifts of leaves under hedges and other out of the way areas. They might be sheltering hibernating wildlife such as hedgehogs or bumblebees.

Store them

Small amounts of autumn leaves can be saved and regularly added to your compost heap as 'brown' material. They make a good balancing ingredient for wet and soggy materials like grass cuttings and kitchen waste. However, large quantities of autumn leaves are best recycled separately. This is because unlike garden compost which is broken down by speedy bacteria that like it warm; leaves are mainly rotted down by the slow, cool action of fungi.

1. Take a black bin liner and punch a few holes in the side and bottom.
2. Rake up leaves weekly and stash in the bag.
3. When almost full, sprinkle with water, shake and tie.
4. Store in a shady spot and the following autumn the leaves will have rotted down into a rich, crumbly mixture that can be used as a mulch around the base of plants.
5. Let the leaves rot down for another year if you want to use as soil conditioner.

Building a leaf bin

Here's how to make a bin 60cm square by 90cm high - if you change the dimensions, make sure you can still reach easily into the bin to remove the leaf mould.

You will need:

- * 1 roll galvanised chicken netting: 3m x 0.9m (10ft x 3ft)
- * 4 tree stakes: 1.2m x 40mm (4ft x 1.5in)
- * galvanised staples
- * Mallet
- * Hammer
- * Wire cutters
- * Heavy gloves

Hammer the tree stakes into the ground, 60cm apart, to make a square frame. Keep as upright as possible and leave 90cm of stake above ground. Unroll chicken wire and attach to first stake with five galvanised staples. Pull tightly to the next stake, attach with staples again and repeat on all sides. Wearing gloves, snip off any excess wire with clippers and bend in any sharp edges.

