



The Daily Gleaner

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Nature's Finest Compost

*Every leaf speaks bliss to me,
Fluttering from the autumn tree.*

Emily Bronte

I remember vividly the beautiful autumn days of my childhood, spent jumping in the crisp, colored leaves so carefully raked by my parents. What I didn't know then, however, is that leaves provide an equally important role once reach the ground in the fall, as they do when they provide tree cover in the spring and summer.

We are blessed in Fredericton to have ample urban forest cover – approximately 68 percent – significantly higher than the North American average. However, since a large portion of those trees are deciduous, meaning they shed their foliage in the fall, this translates into a lot of leaves falling to the ground. Many years ago, the City of Fredericton decided to invest in the practice of converting fallen leaves into rich topsoil, through composting windrows. At the City's composting facility the windrows are filled with rich organic matter, including leaves, yard waste, grass, and other landscaping waste that is collected from City projects, contractors, and homeowners dropping compostables at the site. Leaves comprise a large portion of the compostable matter, which is why the City offers an annual Fall Leaf Pickup, collecting leaves from residents to add to the City's compost.

Should you choose to rake your leaves and place them at the curbside for pick-up, be sure to use compostable paper bags this year. This is the preferred option for the fall leaf pickup taking place from November 1-12. Compostable paper bags are bigger, easier to fill, more tear resistant, and can be sent to the Municipal Compost Facility to be entirely composted with absolutely no waste. This is far superior to the plastic bag option that has been used in the past, as once the leaves were removed from the plastic bags for composting, the bags then had to be sent to the landfill as waste (given they were too contaminated with dirt and debris to be recycled).

Leaves are a key ingredient at the compost facility, which produces grade 'A' topsoil each year for use all around the city for plantings and flower gardens along streets, and in parks and greenspaces. So your choice to use compostable paper bags is an extremely environmental choice and ensures the City's homemade topsoil program can continue to thrive.

Most homeowners see raking leaves as a way to maintain a well-landscaped and tidy yard. However, consider that fallen leaves do provide an important insulating and composting service for your perennial gardens, shrub and flower beds. Consider raking leaves onto your garden beds for the winter. This will insulate annual plants and flowers, and some leaves will de-compose over the winter, supplying the soil

with beneficial nutrients that will encourage healthy growth in the spring. I often wondered why my grandfather did this, as it wasn't the most curb-appealing, but each year his irises and hydrangeas came back healthy and vibrant in the spring, and now I understand why!

Another great option is to mulch the fallen leaves with your lawnmower, and leave them to compost into your lawn over the winter. Again, this provides nutrients to your grass and the soil beneath, and translates into a healthier lawn come spring. If you are choosing this route make sure leaves are nice and dry when you mulch them.

Over the next several weeks, as you marvel at nature and her changing colours, remember the benefits that leaves provide – both on the branch, and on the ground.

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