

Leaf Compost Made Easy

by Laureen Rama for Friends of Fish Creek Newsletter, Nov. 2008

Compost is the best thing you can add to your lawn, your trees, shrubs, flowers. Compost has nutrients your plants need to grow well and stay healthy. Compost also has organic matter and helps soil retain moisture. And perhaps most importantly, compost has micro-organisms - the bacteria, fungi, and other little beasts that make nutrients from the soil available for plants to use.

Fall is when nature recycles the nutrients and organic matter in leaves - they drop to the ground and over the winter they decompose to release nutrients, create more organic matter in the soil and to harbour micro-organisms. Leaving those leaves on your flower, tree, and shrub beds is a great idea. They will not only decompose to feed your plants, they will protect the plants from the winter cold.

If you remove the leaves from your lawn or beds, make them into compost that you can add next season to renew your lawn and beds. You can add the leaves to your compost bin.

An easy way to make leaves into compost is to leave them in large plastic bags, add water so the leaves are wet (they need moisture to compost), poke a hole in the bottom of the bag so water does not stay pooled in the bottom. By spring or some time in summer, the leaves should have composted. Then you can just put this compost on top of your flowerbeds (topdressing). You can also use a leaf rake to spread it over your lawn.

Leaf mulch and compost are the most natural way to keep your yard healthy and recycle nutrients in your own yard! If you have more than you need, take your leaves to the local Leaf and Pumpkin drop-off spot. The City of Calgary makes these into compost that they use on City properties.

I pick-up a truckload of bagged leaves from local alleyways at this time of year to make my leaf bag compost. I also save some bags of leaves to add to my compost bin over the winter. As I add my kitchen waste, I cover it with leaves to keep a balance of materials in the compost bin.

Using leaf compost means you won't have to use fertilizers on your yard which have chemicals and salts that leach into waterways such as Fish Creek and can harm the natural ecosystem in the creek.

Laureen Rama runs Eco-yards™, a landscape design, installation, and health (spraying actively aerated compost tea) business in Calgary. Her book: *Eco-Yards™ : Simple steps to earth-friendly landscapes* is now available at booksellers and her web-site www.eco-yards.com.