



Andy's Garden

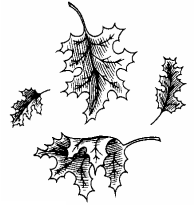
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Compost: Leaf It Up To Nature



For today's gardener, raking up fall's leaves is the easy part. Disposing of them is more difficult. It has been estimated that 20% of our landfill space contains lawn and garden debris. With the current landfill crisis, a growing number of communities now refuse to accept leaves and grass clippings as part of their normal trash service. So, what can be done with this unavoidable fall harvest?

RECYCLE: Andy's Garden suggests recycling leaves, giving them back to nature in the form of compost or mulch. The process is easy and has a real pay-off for the gardener, as well as the environment. Composting is as easy as 1, 2, 3, and 4.

1) GATHER THE LEAVES. Rake leaves into a pile and then run the lawn mower through to shred them. Some lawn mowers now have leaf choppers attached to them. The leaves will be easier to handle and will decompose faster.

2) CREATE A COMPOST AREA. This can simply be a hole dug into a remote corner of the yard, a home-constructed bin, or one of the commercial units now on the market. To construct your own compost bin, nail pieces of wood together in a "U" shape, 2 to 3 feet high. You can attach chicken wire to it to help with aeration.

3) ADD LEAVES IN THREE-LAYER FORMULA. 10 - 12 inches of leaves, 1 inch of soil, and a handful of nitrogen fertilizer. Repeat layers to a 3 foot level, filling the compost bin. Grass clippings and plant debris can also be added.

4) ADD MOISTURE AND STIR. The important difference between compost and rotting leaves is turning the compost material on a regular basis to add oxygen and moisture. If the season is dry, you may need to add some water, but don't soak.

A successful compost pile will generate considerable heat as micro-organisms break down matter. The middle of the pile can reach 150 to 200 degrees. On a cold day, when you see steam rising from the pile, you'll know you're making progress. This pasteurizing process will kill all weed seeds and diseased organisms, resulting in clean, healthy humus to add to your garden.

In cold climates, the compost pile will freeze, but after winter's thaw will start to cook again. If space allows, it's best to keep 2 or 3 compost piles working so that one can be cooking while you use the other. During cool weather, it may take 3 months for the compost to be complete. You'll know it's done by the dark color and earthy smell.

Next spring, when you dig your "private label" compost into the flower beds, your plants will shoot up, more beautiful than ever, to thank you for recycling.



**Making the world beautiful
one flower at a time.**