



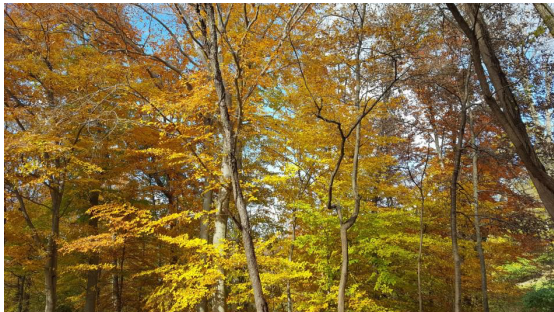
6 Reasons to Use Autumn Leaves as Mulch!

Written by [Joe Foster](#) in [Gardening Tips](#)

Autumn leaves are one of the most underappreciated resources for your garden. In this article I will show you how you can use your leaves to drastically improve soil health. Using leaves as mulch was the single biggest factor for the improvement in my garden soil.

The **main benefits of using leaf mulch** are:

- **Improve soil fertility, nutrients**
- **Improve soil moisture retention**
- **Prevents weeds from germinating**



How to Make Leaf Mulch

To make a mulch from leaves, all you need to do is run over them with the lawn mower, and bag them. That's it! Then apply a layer to the vegetable garden or flower beds. You can also just crush dried leaves by hand to shred them if need be.

Why should you shred leaves?

Shredding the leaves is important for several reasons:

- Shredded leaves will allow moisture to penetrate to the soil
- Whole leaves can easily blow away, while shredded leaves stay locked together better. So, your mulch is less likely to blow away!
- Shredded leaves have more surface area, making them decompose faster

1 – Leaf Mulch adds organic matter to soil

Over the winter and during the next growing season the leaves will break down naturally. This will create a layer of organic matter on top of your soil. Worms will naturally transfer this layer down into your soil. This layer of organic matter will also naturally penetrate the soil over time.



A 6-12" thick layer of shredded leaves on my vegetable garden
Organic matter will help any soil. Clay soil drains better (and digs easier) with the addition of organic matter. Sandy soil will hold moisture better with addition of organic matter.

Also, Did you know that leaves can be [used to make compost](#) (Link to our post on our easy method to compost.) Now you do.

2 – Leaf Mulch Improves Soil Fertility

Gardeners the world over have known for centuries the benefits leaf litter can have on soil fertility. Many university studies have actually quantified just how much fertility can be improved by the amount of leaves. [1] [2]

*Want to know how many nutrients and their quantities are actually in leaves? [Click Here!](#)

3 – Leaf Mulch increases moisture retention

Leaf mulch and shredded leaves will decompose and increase the amount of organic matter in soil. Research has consistently shown that organic matter increases moisture retention. Gupta & Larson developed a regression model showing positive correlation between organic matter and water content of soil [3].

4 – Leaf Mulch increases available minerals

Tree leaves transfer [minerals and other nutrients](#) to leaves during the growing season. They are able to pull these nutrients from the deep roots of the tree. At the end of the growing season, after the leaves fall, they return the minerals to the ground through decomposition.



Beneath the layer of leaf mulch is about 2-3" of black loam, then into the clay. And note the worm in the clay, thereby spreading organic matter and reducing compaction.

You can naturally add these essential minerals to your soil by letting shredded leaves decompose in your garden.

5 – Leaf Mulch will reduce and prevent weeds the following year

Copied from <https://growitbuildit.com/reasons-to-use-leaf-mulch/>

By creating a new layer of organic matter on top of your soil via decomposing leaves, you create a barrier. Well, that barrier will prevent sunlight from reaching weed seeds, thus preventing weed germination.

Since I started using leaf mulch in my garden, I've had far fewer weeds. My soil used to be overrun with all types of clover and grasses. But I was amazed just how quickly the leaf mulch helped prevent weeds from even germinating.

6 – Leaf Mulch is FREE

You can get leaves for free from your own yard. You can also just take them from the street! In my neighborhood (and probably yours too) people rake their Autumn leaves and leave them bagged along the curb. They are essentially throwing away free fertilizer/compost material!



So, turn your neighbors loss into your gain by swiping their 'trash' aka leaves!

Should you till the leaves into the soil?

NO! Don't till the leaves into the soil. It is not necessary. If the leaves decompose within the soil they will consume nitrogen, thus depriving your vegetable plants of a key nutrient. Just leave them on top of the soil, and their nutrients will do their thing, and be available for your veggies!

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https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCkF65MtNH_y_P1xLfzradEhg?

Autumn Leaf Mulch 2021 Update

<https://youtu.be/McrF-cO-mnQ>

References:

[1] – Meier, I.C., Leuschner, C. & Hertel, D. [Nutrient return with leaf litter fall in Fagus sylvatica forests across a soil fertility gradient](#). Plant Ecol 177, 99–112 (2005).

[2] – Sariyildiz, T., Anderson, J.M. [Interactions between litter quality, decomposition and soil fertility: a laboratory study](#). Soil Biology and Biochemistry, V35 Issue 3, 391-399 (2003).

[3] – Gupta, S.C., Larson, W.E. [Estimating soil water retention characteristics from particle size distribution, organic matter percent, and bulk density](#). Water Resources Research, V15 Issue 6. Page 1633-1635 (1979).