

Gold in the Garden: Fallen Leaves



Get out your rake and get those leaves piled up because they're not just a nuisance, they're the perfect free tool for the frugal gardener. Enlist the help of a friend and collect all those leaves for use right in the garden. No need to buy bags to dispose of them!

Ways to Use Raked Leaves

There are a variety of ways to use fallen leaves in the garden. You'll need to spend some time gathering them up, but otherwise, they're free! Here are some ideas for using up fallen leaves:

- **Winter mulch** – In Zone 5b, the winters get really cold. Even cold-hardy plants need a bit of protection. While some people recommend shredding leaves before applying them as mulch, I'm a bit lazy. I make sure to use dry

ones and crumble them slightly when applying. This year, I'm using leaves to protect my fall garlic, kale, and a few other overwintering plants.

- **To line the bottom of newly installed beds** – A few years ago, my husband built 4x4 raised beds for me. They're relatively tall, so filling them is a challenge both physically and financially. Fortunately, we have two huge maple trees on our property, so we use the leaves to add volume to the bottom of the boxes before filling them up in the spring.
- **Compost pile addition** – Leaves are the perfect addition for the compost pile. Not everyone has a compost pile to add leaves to, so many cities pick up bags of leaves from their citizens. Don't bother bagging and putting them out curbside. Add them directly to your compost pile or bin.
- **Don't remove leaves that have fallen in your beds** – I've noticed that the earth in my raised beds compacts over time. It means I need to add soil each year. Instead, add leaves in the fall. They'll break down and add rich organic matter to your soil. In the spring, add a layer of finished compost over the decomposed leaves.
- **Use clean, dried leaves as autumn decor** – Skip the home decor store and use colorful autumn leaves in your seasonal decor.
- **Craft with kids** – Browse Pinterest for a variety of creative kid-friendly craft ideas to do with leaves.

No Deciduous Trees In Your Yard? No Problem

Don't have to deal with fallen leaves on your property? Lucky you! No clean up required. That doesn't mean you're out of luck in the gardening-department, however. Offer to take your friend or family's leaves off their hands. Better yet, offer your leaf raking services in exchange for free bags of leaves. It's a win-win for everyone involved.

Caution

One word of caution when raking up and using leaves from your yard. Watch out for ticks. They're hard to spot and even if you're well-covered from head to toe can cling to clothing and eventually find their way onto your skin. Some areas are more likely to have ticks than others, but always make sure to do a quick skin check after playing in the leaves or gathering them up.