



Henderson County Master Gardeners Weekly News Article December 1, 2015

Leaves to Love, Now and Later

by Lydia Holley

Have you driven around East Texas lately? The red, yellow and orange leaves of deciduous trees are mixed alongside evergreens, turning the countryside into a decorative tapestry.

This process has mainly to do with the shorter daylight hours as winter approaches, causing chlorophyll production to shut down. The green color we normally see begins to wane. It is because of this lack of chlorophyll that we can now see the colors from glucose that is left behind in the leaves. Whether the leaves turn red, gold or orange is dependent upon which type of glucose is predominant in that particular tree.



Trees such as maples, dogwoods, sweet gums, crape myrtle, river birch, redbuds, pear, ginko, sassafras, and smokebush are just a few that usually deliver a dependable show. Paint your landscape for autumn by noting which trees turn the colors you want to use in your palette. Group them together for the best display. The addition of showy shrubs with contrasting trees can turn your landscape into a spectacular exhibit from ground to sky.

After the beautiful autumn show, however, there is always the problem with what needs to be done with all those leaves that litter the lawn, accumulate in the garden beds, and pile up in the pathways. It may look romantic to some. Children may see these leaves as a fun mat to roll around in, leaving leaf remains stuck in their hair and clothes. Others, however, fear that a thick mat of leaves will smother their grass, bulbs and perennials. Gardeners should see these falling leaves as pennies from heaven because they can be used in compost - the black gold of the garden.

Now is the perfect time to start a compost pile, or add to an existing one. To help reduce matting, aid in decomposition, and increase air flow, be certain to shred your leaves before adding them to your compost pile. You can easily do this by running over a pile of leaves with your lawn mower, by using a string trimmer on leaves placed in a round garbage can, or by using a leaf blower that has a vacuum mulching feature.

Leaves are easy to love now, when putting on a stunning display, improving the looks of your landscape. They are also easy to love later, after they have been discarded by the trees, picked up by the gardener, shredded, then composted, which can ultimately improve your garden's soil.

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