

Ann Arbor News “Your World” Submission for 10/23/2006:

As the brilliant colors of autumn begin to fade, we turn to the less appealing task of dealing with fallen leaves. Please consider the following:

- The easiest and most effective way to get rid of your leaves is just to leave them where they fall. The next time you mow, the leaves will be shredded into a fine mulch. If left, the leaves, along with your grass clippings, will decompose very quickly, adding valuable nutrients to your soil. Shredded leaves can also be used as mulch under trees and bushes, and in your garden beds.
- If you are fond of raking your leaves, consider pushing them to a corner of the yard where they can sit and decompose. To speed up this process, use a compost bin to keep your pile more contained. Washtenaw County has compost bins available at 705 N. Zeeb Road for only \$7. They are made of recycled plastic and are lightweight and easy to assemble.
- Keep leaves out of the gutter. As leaves build up in our storm drains, they begin to decay, releasing nutrients and gases that flow untreated into local rivers and streams, depleting the oxygen available to fish and other aquatic organisms. So keep an eye on your neighborhood streets. If the gutters are clogged with leaves, clear them with a rake or broom. If you live in a municipality that offers street leaf collection, remember that you are required to store your leaves on your extension and not rake leaves into the street until the day before the scheduled street pickup day.
- Also clear leaves from the gutters on your home before freezing temperatures arrive. If leaves are left, they can block water from draining properly. This water can collect and freeze, forming ice dams which can damage your roof and contribute to mold growth in your attic.
- Michigan law prohibits leaf burning in populations of over 7,500, and many townships have enacted their own ordinances to ban it. If you live in a municipality that continues to allow leaf burning, be aware that in addition to producing greenhouse gases, burning leaves is a health hazard. Leaf smoke produces cancer-causing dioxins and hydrocarbons. It also releases particulate matter, which can deposit in the lungs, increasing the chances of respiratory infection, and triggering asthma attacks.

So remember, composting is the easiest, healthiest and most environmentally-friendly way to deal with fallen leaves. For more guidance on how to compost, visit <http://recycle.ewashtenaw.org> or call 734-222-6874.

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