

Leave the Leaves

A program encouraging residents to mow & mulch leaves
back into their lawn

Starting this fall....

The Shade Tree Commission and The Green Team

invite you to

Join the “Don’t Blow, Mulch & Mow” Challenge

Pick a section of your yard to mow the leaves.

After you are comfortable, increase the size. You can then start to rake leaves from the planting beds into the lawn to mulch them in.

If leaf mulch is excessive in the lawn it can be put back into the planting beds to create homemade mulch.

Ask landscapers to mow the grass and leaves into the lawn

See below for information on how to start...

How natural mulch works:

The forest naturally breaks down leaves and plant material during the winter months. Birds and other animals walk on and under fallen leaves constantly moving and breaking them down while the rain and snow breaks down the pieces further. Your mower acts as the agent to reduce the leaf size, allowing rain, snow, and microorganisms to break them down creating home-made mulch. By the time spring comes, new plants use this nutrient rich mulch to grow. The leaf mulch acts as a protective layer in the winter. During the growing season the mulch prevents weed growth and helps to conserve water. Leaf mulch decomposes over time adding important nutrients and structure to the soil.

Reasons why to leave the leaves:

- Saves money - No further need to fertilize the lawn and planting beds. Grass and leaf clippings are natural fertilizers, providing nitrogen to the soil
- Saves time - Less time and money spent on raking and blowing leaves
- Better Health – Improves air quality by reducing allergens in the air letting you breath easier
- Reduces pollution - Keeps leaves out of sewer drains
- Quieter neighborhoods – Reduces noise pollution
- Saves the Borough money – Minimizes waste disposal costs
- Encourages biodiversity – Leaves are an important source for overwintering beneficial insects and butterflies, which also leads to a more varied bird population.

Myths about mulching leaves that prevent residents from mowing leaves:

- Leaf mulch will be messy
- Neighbors might complain
- Increase population of unwanted bugs and other pests
- Special equipment will be needed

How To Mulch Leaves:

- Mulch-mowing can be done by using a mower without the bag or by using a leaf shredder. Depending on the type of mower blade, you may need to pass over the leaf pile several times. Mulched leaves can then be left on in a thin layer on your lawn or they can be placed in a 3-4" layer on garden beds and around shrub and trees.
- You can also dedicate a small area of your yard to a free-form leaf compost area. Pile leaves in the area and let nature take care of them. In 2-3 years the leaves will turn into mulch.
- Rake leaves from hardscapes (driveways and patios) onto the lawn; mow leaves into the lawn. Mow leaves on the hardscape surface and move the mulched leaves into garden beds or lawn. Lawn sweepers are also a good alternative to remove leaf litter, twigs, and acorns from hardscape surfaces and lawns.

Mulching leaves on perennial beds:

Blowing leaves out of landscaped beds, around shrubs and tree roots, removes valuable nutrients and is destructive to topsoil. To add leaf mulch in perennial flower beds, rake excessive leaves from between plants and shrubs, pile them in rows between the plants and then mow the rows. The volume is reduced and the leaves will gradually turn into compost, enriching the soil. There is no need to remove leaves from ground covers like pachysandra. You can gently rake over the plants so that the leaves fall under the plants to the ground. The leaves will naturally decompose over the winter.

Free Seedlings grown Naturally

By leaving a small area of your yard free from mowing altogether, you will create your own tree nursery. Small saplings of native trees will appear and grow giving you a new, low-cost, no-maintenance tree! Because the tree grew naturally in a place that was favorable for optimal health and survival, the tree will require little care. It can take 2-3 years for a sapling to grow.

- Pick an area of your yard where you want a tree to grow and mark it off with stakes or a garden fence.
- Make sure to compensate for the size the tree will be when it is mature. Typically keeping 20-30ft from houses, fences, pathways is a good rule of thumb.
- Leave the area alone and patiently wait.
- As saplings grow, leave them for 2-3 years, and then pick one of the trees to continue to grow, removing the others by pruning them to the ground. Or you can gently dig extra saplings and transplanting to another area of your property or give to a friend.

Please remember: Don't dump leaves, branches, or other garden waste into the woods or parks