



Eugene Waste Prevention

# Turning Over a New Leaf

*Making the most of leaves in Eugene*

How to manage leaves to make the best use of urban natural resources.

## Waste Prevention

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Every fall, Mother Nature delivers her bounty of leaves bringing blessings to sustainable gardeners. The best way to handle this bounty is by keeping leaves on site where they improve soil and storm water quality, decrease transportation costs along with wear & tear on city streets, improve bicycle safety, and reduce chemical inputs to your lawn and garden. Leaves are a wonderful resource when used as mulch, raked into piles and under shrubs, mowed into shredded bits, and composted into garden gold. See reverse for more details.



The City of Eugene’s Waste Prevention & Green Building program encourages you to handle leaves in this order:

- 1) Use leaves on-site
- 2) Put leaves in your yard debris bin
- 3) Haul leaves to a compost facility
- 4) Put leaves out for City collection and follow

City guidelines as to when and where leaves may be left in the street. The first three methods listed here

are the most economically and environmentally beneficial because they promote reduced costs for public services and increased soil health for residents even if they are not avid gardeners.

### *On-Site Use of Leaves:*

No doubt about it, the most beneficial choice for your garden, the community, and the environment. When used as mulch, shredded into tiny bits, or transformed into compost, leaves are a dynamic force in creating rich healthy soils.

### *Off-Site Use of Leaves:*

#### **Yard debris collection is provided by your licensed hauler.**

Yard debris service is included with garbage collection if your service level is 32 gallons twice a month or greater. Yard debris is collected by haulers twice a month, providing an opportunity to recycle leaves into beneficial compost. Extra yard debris containers can be requested for an additional \$2.30 to \$3.20 per month depending on where you live. Those without garbage service can subscribe for yard debris collection by contacting any licensed garbage hauler in Eugene.

#### **Haul to a composting facility.**

Yard debris composting facilities such as Rexius or Lane Forest Products will take leaves for a minimal charge along with other yard debris material. Remember, “if it grows, it goes.” Keep soil, garbage, plastic, and sod out of the compost.

#### **Use the City of Eugene leaf collection program.**

Follow the leaf program guidelines at [www.eugene-or.gov/leaf](http://www.eugene-or.gov/leaf) or call 541-682-4800 for more information. By using the methods described in this fact sheet, not a single leaf will enter the landfill, making better use of our natural resources.

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## *What to do with all those leaves!*

Leaves are high in minerals and organic matter that feed the soil and improve soil structure for all soil types.



Most leaves are beneficial, ranging in pH from 4.4 to 6.8. Even walnut leaves left to sit for a year can make fine mulch for the garden. Here are several methods to help you use leaves to your advantage!

**Leave ‘em!** Let leaves decompose naturally where they fall! Nature’s decomposers will break down leaf debris from one year to the next!



**Request ‘em!** Don’t have enough leaves? Request a 7-yard load of leaves collected in your neighborhood to be delivered to your property through the City’s Leaf Collection program (<http://www.eugene-or.gov/leaf>).

**Mulch ‘em!** Rake leaves under trees and shrubs or into a pile or wire bin and “leaf them be”. Within 12 months to 2 years, these leaves will slowly break down into “leaf mold” which can hold over 300 times its weight in water, creating a water savings bank for soils during hot summer months.



**Mow ‘em!** Make quick leaf mulch by mowing leaves into shredded pieces. Use a mulching lawn mower or add a mulching blade to a non-mulching mower. Shredded leaves will decompose much faster than whole leaves and is well worth the effort. Use shredded leaf mulch to deter weeds and improve water retention throughout the summer. Mulch with 3-6” on garden beds, and 6-12” on garden pathways.

**Trench ‘em!** Pathway “trench” composting with leaves is the practice of removing soil from pathways and replacing it with 12-24 inches of leaves every fall. Pathway soil and composted leaf material is used to raise the level of growing beds.



**Compost ‘em!** Coffee grounds, food scraps, and grass clippings all blend well with leaves to speed up decomposition. In general, for every bucket of leaves add 1 bucket of grass clippings, or 1/2 bucket of food waste or coffee grounds. Compost in a pile, a bin, or on the ground in layers, mixing materials or alternating layers as you go. Always cover any compost pile with a final layer of leaves to deter pests.

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### *For More Information:*

OSU Extension Service Master Gardener Compost Specialists are available to talk compost with you! Call 541-344-0265 Monday-Thursday 10am-1pm and 2pm-5pm. You can also access more composting information from [www.eugenerecycles.org](http://www.eugenerecycles.org).

City of Eugene *Waste Prevention & Green Building Program*

*Promoting sustainable practices in waste prevention and the built environment*