

Union Township Guide to Leaf and Yard Waste Management

In order to keep our municipal taxes as low as possible, Union Township does not pick up leaves or other yard waste (tree branches, lawn clippings, etc.). Most of the independent waste haulers in our area will not pick them up, either, even if they are bagged and left with residential garbage. Do not place yard waste along roads or in drainage ditches, as it becomes a road hazard, interferes with proper road drainage by blocking culverts, and dumps high levels of nutrients into local streams. Think of leaves and yard waste as an asset rather than a burden. Consider one of these simple procedures to benefit your soil and plants:

1. It's easy to **rake or blow leaves into a woodlot**, if available. Break up twigs and branches and add them to the leaves, where they will decompose over time.
2. **Use a mulching mower** to allow nutrient-rich grass clippings to feed your lawn. Adopt a mowing schedule to keep clippings short enough to filter through growing grass and not remain as a mat on top of the lawn. Research and experience indicate that only 1/3 of the grass length should be removed during mowing. Never allow the lawn grass to double its height between mowings
3. **Mulch leaves with a mower** so they can disappear back into the lawn. The fragmented leaves can also be raked onto flower or garden beds as mulch – a technique particularly appropriate for owners of small lots. Though a mower with a mulching blade would be optimal, all power mowers should do an adequate job. Mulched leaves hold in moisture, suppress weeds, keep the soil cool in the summer, and slowly release nutrients.
4. **Rake leaves into a pile for composting.** A corral or circle of wire fencing will help contain the leaves and keep them from blowing around. A readily available fencing is 3 feet high, green, and comes in rolls at the local hardware store. The composting corral is essentially invisible when tucked into a back corner of a residential lot. A U-shape may be preferred so that leaves can be raked right into the enclosure rather than lifted over the fencing. The leaf pile quickly reduces in size over the winter. Green yard waste like soft twig prunings and weeds can be mixed into the pile in limited amounts. Contrary to popular notions of composting, it is not necessary to laboriously turn a leaf piles, nor do they create odors.

For more information about ways to recycle yard waste and fall leaves, visit the Rutgers Cooperative Extension Service website at www.rce.rutgers.edu. *This article was adapted from "The Princeton Guide to Fall Leaf Management", written by the Princeton Environmental Commission, and is used with the permission of the authors.*