

# Leaves can be a windfall for most home gardens



**Carla Keast**

## AROUND THE YARD

For the low-maintenance gardener, as well as the frugal gardener, autumn's leaves are a windfall.

There's no end of things to do with leaves. Add them to your existing beds as a mulch; mix them into your composter; turn them into leaf mould. Do whatever is most convenient for you — just don't throw them away!

Low-maintenance gardeners love mulch. A five- to eight-centimetre layer cuts back on two of the more tedious and time-consuming gardening tasks: weeding and watering. Bark chips and bark mulch are commonly used, but leaves work just as well. The look is not quite as polished, but the result will be the same.

Applying a leaf mulch is a bit different

than other mulches. Leaves are light and blowy, and are probably being scooped with a rake, or dropped by the armload onto the bed. Be careful to clear the leaves well away from the base of your plants. Keep them several inches away from your tree trunks. Coral bells, irises, and oriental poppies particularly dislike having their crowns covered in mulch. Also keep in mind that some plants such as stonecrop, and most alpine such as thrift and pussy-toes, require dry growing conditions and will not appreciate any kind of mulch.

If you've got the time, mow the leaves prior to mulching your beds. It breaks them up which helps keep them in place, and gives the decomposition process a head start. If you are using maple leaves, or any leaf that is very flat, it is essential to break them up, or they will form a thick impermeable crust.

The composter is a natural destination for leaves. They are the the so-called brown layer and by fall, most composters are well endowed with green layer supplies (such as kitchen and garden waste) and in need of some brown. Composting is very easy to do. The City of Winnipeg offers a very good deal on compost bins each spring.

Leaf mould is an excellent soil amendment. Bag up the leaves, add some moisture, seal the bag, put a few holes in it, and set it aside for a couple of years. The resulting leaf mould can be incorporated into the soil as you add new plantings.

*Carla Keast has a master's degree in landscape architecture and is a Winnipeg-based freelance landscape designer. She can be reached at [contact@carlakeast.com](mailto:contact@carlakeast.com).*

**Flyer Advantage**

**CARRIERS WANTED**