

Munch ON THIS



Leaves

By Marcia Rae
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Fall in Oregon is so delightful with the nasty cold rains making a mess of the fallen leaves. Fallen leaves, though, mean leaves that need to be taken up, which to some sounds a lot like work. But when are the things that we think of as chores not chores at all? Rather, they are the things that life is made of, satisfying and exhilarating, the events and activities that bring us together.

So when, oh glorious day, the gloomy skies part and a ray of warm, weak, fall sun finds its way through the window, put on the barn jacket and head outside. Most of the leaves will be down and they are like gold to a gardener. Forget the leaf blower -- that nasty, noisy contraption, polluting the crisp fall air with its two-stroke engine. Drag out the rakes and put the kids to work. Detach them from their video games and help them have memories for later in life when they will need them.

Trees and leaves are under-valued in the gardening world with our focus on cover crops and manure. But imagine these giant creatures worming their way deep into the world, cracking rocks apart with the miracle of the root tip, sucking the juicy nutrients from the rocks and with mighty capillary action brining life up and out of the earth and into the daylight. Think of it as gathering nutrients for the garden, nutrients provided by the trees just for our use.

If they are walnut tree leaves, use them in the garden paths. If they are crackly, brittle leaves, put them on the garden beds as mulch, protecting the delicate soil from the heavy winter rains. In the spring, turn them under, adding organic material and improving your soil tilth.

You can use the leaves as mulch or as a component of compost. In either case they will do a better job if they are shredded. A mulching mower (or any mower, really) will work. Instead of raking the leaves, mow them. Mow the grass at the same time and create a mixture of brown and green, perfect for compost. Mow over the leaves a couple of times to shred them more. Put directly onto the garden as mulch or into a pile and let them winter over, turning into compost in a few months. But for pity's sake, don't waste them by burning them or putting them in the trash. See them as they are, gardeners gold, dropping from the sky.

Munch on This – When is work, play? And play, work?

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