

## Homes & Real Estate

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### When life gives you a yard full of leaves, make compost

Leaves not only produce good compost, but also good exercise for those who rake them, typically burning off 150 calories in 30 minutes, according to Harvard Health.

By Tom Watson

Special to NWhomes

#### **Ecoconsumer**

Just one large tree can produce a bounty of 30,000 to 50,000 leaves every year.

Physics professor Rhett Allain at Southeastern Louisiana University came up with that estimate a couple years ago using various calculations.

If you have trees on your property, you have a simpler task. You just need to figure out what to do with your fallen leaves when they start piling up.

For starters, make a commitment to use your leaves as a resource — just as nature intended — by turning them into compost or mulch.

These days, you have plenty of choices for how to do that, starting with how you pick up your leaves. So let's jump into the pile.

#### ***Blown away***

Not everyone enjoys it, but raking leaves provides moderate aerobic exercise, typically burning off 150 calories in 30 minutes, according to Harvard Health.

If you have numerous sizable trees, you might want to use a leaf blower to get the job done faster. But with concerns about climate change rising to the fore, you should strive to gather your leaves using minimal fossil fuels.

Instead of the stereotypical noisy, stinky gasoline-powered leaf blower, Consumer Reports recommends corded electric leaf blowers for most yards.

Pricier but without the hassles of a cord, rechargeable electric leaf blowers seem to get better every year. Several of the latest models boast more power and a longer battery life.

Also consider an electric-powered leaf blower/vacuum that shreds the leaves, available from Toro for example.

A corded, stand-alone electric leaf shredder can make your work easier as well. One model, from Worx, will turn 11 bags of leaves into one bag of mulch. It mulches the leaves with a relatively safe, bladeless spinning-wire system, like a weed trimmer.

#### ***Loud and clear***

Although gas-powered leaf blowers are generally less noisy than they used to be, their pollution and racket have generated increasing opposition.

The city of Seattle has been researching this issue and considering possible action on leaf blowers since last fall, after receiving citizen complaints. A MoveOn.org petition, "Ban Gas Powered Leaf Blowers in Seattle," has more than 450 online signatures.

Much of the opposition targets the use of leaf blowers by landscapers or grounds maintenance staff. Representatives of businesses and institutions that use them often argue that their workers need high-powered gas leaf blowers to get the job done efficiently.

With new technology and product innovation, electric leaf blowers might be available within the next few years that would meet the demands of many landscapers and grounds crews. Maybe someday, mobile solar panels hauled by an electric vehicle could recharge electric leaf blower batteries in the field.

### ***Leave it be***

Meanwhile, back in your yard, you can make compost or mulch from your leaves in a multitude of ways. Nearly as many resources for how to do this are available online and at libraries as there are leaves on a tree.

Some gardeners use fallen leaves immediately as mulch or cover, but generally, the more time and effort you put into it, the quicker your leaves become a highly beneficial material.

As a simple example, you can layer your high-carbon leaves with high-nitrogen grass clippings in a backyard compost bin. Or just leave your leaves piled in a corner of the yard and they'll break down eventually.

As a backup plan, you can always put leaves in your home yard-waste cart for municipal collection. They still get turned into compost. Place extra leaves in a paper yard-waste bag if possible, but check your collection program's requirements. Most area cities charge a small fee to collect extra paper bags or containers of yard waste.

For the ultimate in composting, just leave it to nature.

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