

Leave the Leaves

As the leaves begin to change colors and fall to the ground, homeowners across the City of Stow start up their leaf blowers, attach baggers to their mowers, and unfold plastic tarps stored away in their sheds. Leaf cleanup is a fall tradition across the country. However, the Urban Forestry Commission encourages residents to consider an alternative approach—one that not only changes how you manage leaves on your property but also improves your yard's contribution to the local ecosystem and the environment.

“Leave the leaves” is a growing movement among homeowners, and the concept is simple: when the leaves fall, don't take them to the curb for municipal pickup. Instead, use them to create natural mulch beds around trees, or add them to gardens and landscaped areas.

Keeping your leaf litter is one of the best things you can do for your local ecosystem. Insects such as fireflies and many pollinators use fallen leaves to create overwintering sites, emerging from them in spring. Leaves provide shelter and protection for countless eggs and cocoons that would not otherwise survive the winter. Amphibians and reptiles—like the spotted salamander and the eastern box turtle—also rely on leaf layers for insulation during hibernation. Even the Eastern Red Bat will take refuge in leaf litter during sudden temperature drops.

Leaves also act as a natural fertilizer for native vegetation. When trees drop their leaves, soil organisms begin breaking them down into organic matter that enriches the soil. This natural recycling process reduces nutrient loss for trees and maintains the health of forest ecosystems—a cycle that has evolved over millions of years.

To create your own designated leaf areas, use a blower or rake to move leaves off lawns, sidewalks, and driveways. If you're looking to reduce the size of your lawn, leaf litter can serve as an excellent first layer of mulch for new garden beds. To prevent piles from blowing away, spray them lightly with water. A good leaf bed should be about 3–5 inches deep. As you continue this practice each fall, you'll likely notice greater biodiversity in your yard. If you choose to remove leaves in spring, wait until late spring to allow insects time to emerge as temperatures warm.

For more information on the benefits of leaving the leaves, visit:

 [Xerces Society – Leave the Leaves](#)

 [National Wildlife Federation – Leave the Leaves](#)