

## What Will You Do With Your Leaves?



What will you do with all those leaves that fall on your lawn in the autumn? Will you burn them? Will you bag them and put them into the landfill? Will you blow them onto the street and have them end up causing problems with our stormwater drains?

Have you considered using your leaves in your landscaping? The tree leaves that accumulate in and around your lawn represent a valuable natural resource that can be used to provide a good source of organic matter and nutrients for use in your landscaping. You can and should take advantage of managing and using leaves in your yard's landscaping with the following options:

### Managing and Using Leaves on Your Landscape

Source: *Kansas State University Extension Website*

**Mowing Leaves:** A light covering of leaves can be mowed, simply leaving the shredded leaves in place on the lawn. This technique is most effective when a mulching mower is used or when baffles are attached to conventional mowers. However, mowing the lawn is not an effective method of leaf management when a heavy leaf cover is present. Removing the leaves is then required.

**Mulching with Leaves:** Mulch is any material applied to the soil surface for protection or improvement of the area covered. A layer of leaves applied to the surface of the soil as a mulch around trees, shrubs, in flower and vegetable gardens will conserve soil moisture, control weeds and grasses, reduce soil erosion, and prevent soil crusting. Mowing your leaves or putting them thru a shredder will create a more uniform mulch material.

**Composting Leaves:** Compost is a dark, crumbly and earth-smelling form of organic matter that has gone through a natural decomposition process. Decomposition and recycling of organic wastes are an essential part of soil building and healthy plant growth in forests and pastures, as well as our lawns and gardens. The process of decomposition or composting can be carried out in simple compost piles, bins or more elaborate homemade or purchased devices. Composting leaves and other landscape wastes can be used to add a natural source of nutrients to soil; to loosen tight heavy clay soils; and to help sandy soil retain moisture and nutrients.

**Tilling Leaves into Soil:** There may be an easier, simpler way to incorporate organic materials into garden soils than building a compost pile. Organic materials can be directly applied to garden soil using a plow or tiller which will allow the decomposition or composting process to occur directly in the soil rather than in the compost pile. The autumn season, when a variety of organic materials are available in the form of leaves, pruning, garden refuse, and lawn clippings is an ideal time to do direct application of organic materials into garden soils. A backyard garden tiller should be able to directly incorporate 4" to 5" of organic materials at one time.