

# RECYCLING LEAVES

In a forest, nature's way of leaf disposal is recycling through a slow but essential process on the forest floor. The result is a rich, spongy topsoil. It is home for worms and other organisms that help the process, and it serves the future forest by soaking up water and providing nutrients and a good growing medium for new seedlings.

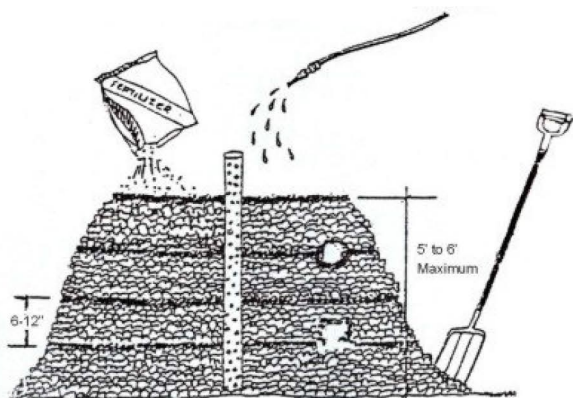
Composting is the same process speeded up. It is simply the biological decomposition of organic wastes under controlled conditions. With a little work and in a space that your yard allows, large quantities of leaves, garden refuse, twigs and grass can be reduced into compost in as short of time as one to three months. You know the compost is ready when your pile becomes a dark, granular mass that resembles peat moss and the individual ingredients are no longer recognizable. Although the end product is not a fertilizer, compost does offer these benefits:

An inexpensive way to dispose of leaves without using landfills or polluting the air

When added to the garden or tree-planting site, compost improves the physical properties of the soil for better root growth by:

- lightening up clays or enhancing soil aggregation in sands.
- decreasing soil crusting or racking.
- improving water infiltration and retention.
- improving aeration.

## HOW TO MAKE A COMPOST PILE



1. Place your compost pile on a soil of good drainage characteristics, or a layer of limbs. Boards, chicken wire or other side frames can help hold the pile together if space is limited.
2. Build successive layers of leaves (except walnut leaves) and other green matter. For more rapid decomposition, chop and mix components together.
3. Cover each layer with 1-2 inches of soil (adding manure makes it even better).
4. Sprinkle each layer with a balanced fertilizer (without weed killer) at a rate of  $\frac{1}{2}$  pound per 10 square feet. (For garden use, add  $\frac{1}{2}$  - 1 pound of lime per 10 square feet.)
5. During dry weather, keep the pile moist. In winter, cover the top with black plastic to insulate and shed excess water.
6. For aeration, place a vertical drainpipe, or a post that can be wiggled occasionally.
7. After the pile is built, turn it with a pitchfork after about 6 weeks. This will aerate and mix the pile, and keep the bacterial processes from overheating