

Autumn leaves rot down to make leafmould - a pleasant, dark brown, crumbly material. Leafmould is a good soil improver, lawn conditioner and mulch. It can be used in seed and potting mixes too.

DO USE all leaves that fall in the autumn. They will be brown and look dead

DON'T USE evergreen leaves - such as holly, laurel or Leyland cypress and other conifers

Good things about leafmould

- It's easy to make
- It cuts out bonfires
- It saves using peat
- It's free

Good things about using leafmould



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- It's clean and easy to handle
- It's good for the soil
- It cuts down on watering
- It can be used on any soil
- It can be used at any time of year

Sources of supply

All sorts of autumn leaves can be used to make leafmould, including plane, beech, oak and walnut. All types will rot down, though some will take longer than others.

Collect fallen leaves from your garden, and from pavements and verges of quiet streets.

Your local council may deliver lorry loads to allotments and other suitably accessible sites. As they have to pay landfill charges for dumping them elsewhere, there should be no charge for this. Ask for parks and cemetery leaves, rather than those from roads, which may contain unwanted contaminants.

Collecting them up

Leaves can be gathered up by hand, using a lawn rake. For larger quantities, leaf hoovers are available, some of which will also shred the leaves, speeding up decay.

Compost or leafmould?

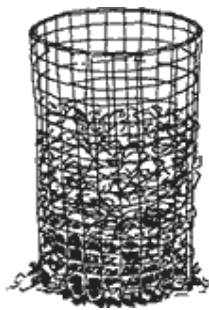
Small amounts of autumn leaves can be added to your compost heap. They make a good balancing ingredient for wet and soggy materials like grass mowings and kitchen waste. Simply save dryish autumn leaves in a bag for use next season.

Autumn leaves are rotted down mainly by the slow, cool action of fungi - rather than the quicker acting bacteria that are responsible for composting. This is why autumn leaves in quantity are best recycled separately in a leafmould heap.

Easy steps to making leafmould



Black plastic sacks
filled with leaves



Wire mesh leafmould bin

1. Collect autumn leaves. All types can be mixed together
2. Water them, if dry, to help them rot
3. Pack leaves into a suitable container
4. Ignore them for a year or two
5. Use the leafmould

Leafmould making containers

All that you need is a secluded corner of the garden, or a simple container, to stop the leaves blowing away.

Black plastic bags can be used. When full of leaves, make a few holes in the bag with a fork and tie the top loosely.

Buy, or make, a simple container made from plastic or wire netting with a few supporting stakes. Adjust the size to suit your requirements.

Using leaves and leafmould

Newly fallen leaves

- Winter cover for bare soil; may have to be removed in spring for sowing and planting
- Mulch for informal paths
- Make into leafmould

'Young' leafmould

1 or 2 years old, depending on tree species. Leaves beginning to break up; easily crumbled in the hand.

- Mulch around shrubs, herbaceous, trees, vegetables
- Dig in as soil improver for sowing and planting
- Autumn top dressing for lawns
- Winter cover for bare soil

Well rotted leafmould

2 years old in most cases. Dark brown crumbly material, with no real trace of original leaves visible.

- Use as for 'young' leafmould above
- Seed sowing mix - Use leafmould on its own, or mixed with equal parts sharp sand and garden compost
- Potting compost - Mix equal parts well rotted leafmould, sharp sand, loam and garden compost

Quick tip for leaves on lawns

Run the mower over leaves on the lawn with the grass box off. The shredded leaves will soon disappear into the lawn. Or run the mower over leaves on the lawn with the grass box on. Add the chopped up mown leaves and grass to a leafmould heap. They will be quicker to rot than whole leaves.

Leaves and wildlife

Don't disturb drifts of autumn leaves under hedges and other out of the way areas. They may be used as hibernating sites by hedgehogs and other creatures.

