Recycle your Autumn leaves to make Leafmould



Do you still have some leaves left over from Autumn? A surplus of fallen leaves could upset the balance of ingredients in your compost bin. However, by turning them into leafmould, a dark brown, crumbly material, you can make a great soil improver, lawn conditioner and mulch for your garden! Leafmould is easy to make, suitable for all types of soil, reduces the need for peat and provides a free, organic matter that can also be used in seed and potting mixes, if well rotted.

Large quantities of dead leaves are best recycled separately because they are broken down by the slow action of fungi rather than bacteria, and therefore rot slowly. All kinds of deciduous leaves can be used for leafmould, although some may take longer to break down than others.

Step 1: Collect the leaves
Small quantities of leaves are best gathered by hand using a rake; however, if you have a large quantity of leaves, they can be collected with a special leaf blower vacuum, which shreds the material into smaller pieces helping to speed up the decaying process.

Step 2: Bag them up, moisten and have a little patience
Bag up the leaves in a large bin bag and punch holes in it to allow the air to circulate. Place in a secluded area of the garden. If the leaves are dry, moisten them with a little water. Alternatively, you can make a simple container made from plastic or wire netting with a few supporting stakes which can be reused year after year. Adjust the size to suit your requirements. Leave the bag or container untouched for between one and two years. The longer you leave it, the finer the leafmould will be.

Step 3: Mulch and Soil Improver
'Young' leafmould, which is one to two years old, can be used as mulch around shrubs, herbaceous borders, trees and vegetables – just add it as a layer on top of existing soil. You can also dig young leafmould into beds as a soil improver for sowing and planting.

Step 4: Sowing mix and potting
Well-rotted leafmould that is two years old or more can be used to make a seed sowing mix. Combine equal parts of leafmould, sharp sand and garden compost for an ideal growing medium.