



** This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/picking-up-fallen-leaves>

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It's Fall, and leaves are everywhere

K-State horticulture expert suggests adding leaves to compost bins

K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. — Cold temperatures came on quickly in Kansas, and leaves have fallen from most trees.

While keeping up with leaves every fall is a challenge, Kansas State University horticulture expert Cynthia Domenghini says the amount of leaf cover on the ground has an impact on the underlying plants.

“Photosynthesis will be restricted in a lawn covered with a dense layer of leaves, preventing it from storing enough energy to survive winter,” Domenghini said.

Leaves can be added to a compost heap, but Domenghini recommends shredding them first. This can be done by mowing over them on the lawn and collecting them in the mower bag or they can be added directly into the planters.

“Incorporate 2-3 inches of shredded leaves to the soil,” Domenghini said. “Shredded leaves can be used as mulch around trees, shrubs and perennials as well.”

Leaf mulch on lawns can help prevent weeds from germinating between grass plants. Leaf mulch has not been shown to negatively effect turf quality, color or soil pH as long as it is shredded, she said.

Shredded leaves can be left on the lawn if they are not too dense, Domenghini adds. As the lawn is mowed, the leaf pieces will fall in between the blades of grass and eventually break down into the soil.

“It may require multiple passes with the lawn mower to get the leaf size small enough. It is also necessary to mow frequently to keep up with the leaf drop,” Domenghini said.

If incorporating leaves into a cool-season lawn, Domenghini said it makes sense to be on a fall nitrogen fertilization program and have done core aeration this fall. You can mow leaves into a warm-season lawn but wait until late May or early June to fertilize and core-aerate, she said.

Domenghini and her colleagues in K-State's Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources produce a [weekly Horticulture Newsletter](#) with tips for maintaining home landscapes and gardens.

Interested persons can subscribe to the newsletter, as well as send their garden and yard-related questions to hortsupport@ksu.edu, or contact your [local K-State Research and Extension office](#).

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story

K-State Horticulture Newsletter, <https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/info-center/newsletters/index.html>

K-State Research and Extension local offices, <https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/statewide-locations.html>

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