

From leaf jumping to composting

Autumn is a colorful and wonderful time of year...until it's time to complete the chore of raking up all of those leaves. Before you bag them up and put them in the trash, let's explore some better options that help out the environment and local farmers as well.

First, a quick primer on why *not* to burn or trash your leaves: Burning leaves and other yard waste adds small soot and ash particles to the air, which increases air pollution, reduces visibility and makes breathing difficult for people with respiratory disorders. It also releases carbon dioxide.

Putting yard waste (as well as food scraps and even paper) into trash bags to go to the landfill contributes to global warming as well. Organic materials that are buried in landfills have no access to the natural elements, namely oxygen, to help them decompose naturally. These biodegradable materials break down anaerobically (without oxygen) which in turn produces methane, a greenhouse gas 23 times more powerful than carbon dioxide. As a result, landfills have become the fourth largest source of human-caused greenhouse gases in the U.S.

So what are your alternatives? For starters, those dry leaves are great carbon-rich ingredients to toss into your compost pile. In a well-functioning pile, organic materials break down aerobically (with oxygen), and rather than becoming a significant contributor to global warming, they create a valuable soil amendment. Compost replenishes depleted soil by slowly releasing nutrients, and even loosens the clay soil dominant in our area. Adding organic matter to lawns and gardens also helps retain water, another definite plus in our arid Colorado climate.

Chopped leaves also make great mulch around trees, shrubs and perennials because as they slowly decompose, they release nutrients back to the plants. The mulch acts as a terrific barrier between your soil and the cold and wind. A lawn mower with a bag attached is an easy way to chop and pick up leaves simultaneously. Or, you can do it the old-fashioned way - jump on them!

If you have more leaves than you know what to do with, you can take them—as well as your droopy Halloween jack 'o' lanterns and pumpkins—to the Broomfield Recycling Center between October 15th and November 30th. There will be special bins available 24/7 at the west end of the facility to collect leaves and pumpkins. We ask that you please take your empty plastic bags home to reuse, and remove all candles and metal objects from the pumpkins.

For those looking to have a little more fun with their pumpkins, join us for our 10th Annual Pumpkin Smash on Saturday, November 3rd from 10 a.m. to noon. Bring the whole family and your pitching arm, and test your accuracy on our bull's-eye target.

The pumpkins and leaves collected during the special collection and the Pumpkin Smash will be delivered to a local farm for composting where they will ultimately break down

and replenish the depleted farmland. Your old organic matter will benefit local farmers by improving their crop yield – the natural way. Hope to see you there!

Genevieve George is Eco-Cycle's Broomfield Outreach Coordinator. To learn more about recycling or the Eco-Cycle/Broomfield Recycling Center, call (303)404-2839 or e-mail genevieve@ecocycle.org