



## Take Care of Texas by Managing Your Leaves



As autumn brings cooler temperatures, it also signals the arrival of another seasonal display—falling leaves.

While [Take Care of Texas](#) encourages you to plant shade trees to help lower your utility bills in the summer, these deciduous trees lose their leaves in the fall. Instead of raking and bagging them, where they'll head to a landfill, put them back into your lawns and gardens, as a valuable source of mulch and fertilizer, and an addition to your compost.

Leaves contain 50 to 80 percent of the nutrients a plant extracts from the soil and air during the season. Grass clippings, leaves, and other yard debris make up 20 percent of the trash sent to landfills each year. It costs Texans over \$250 million a year to collect and dispose of this waste.

There are four basic ways in which leaves can be managed and used in the landscape:

1. [Mowing](#) – a light covering of leaves can be mowed, simply leaving the shredded leaves in place on the lawn. This technique is most effective when a mulching mower is used.
2. [Mulching](#) –a lawn mower with a bagging attachment provides a fast and easy way to shred and collect the leaves. Apply a three to four inch layer of shredded leaves around the base of trees and shrubs. A two to three inch mulch of shredded leaves is ideal for flower beds. For vegetable gardens, a thick layer of leaves placed between the rows functions as a mulch and an all-weather walkway that will allow you to work in your garden during wet periods.
3. [Composting](#) – in addition to leaves, other yard wastes such as grass clippings, pine needles, weeds, and small prunings can be composted. Compost can serve as a soil conditioner that nourishes your yard and reduces the need for outdoor watering up to 60 percent.
4. [Soil Improvement](#) – leaves may be collected and worked directly into garden and flower bed soils. A six to eight inch layer of leaves tilled into a heavy, clay soil will improve aeration and drainage. The same amount tilled into a light, sandy soil, will improve water and nutrient holding capacity.

Applications are being accepting for the [Texas Environmental Excellence Awards](#). Watch [inspirational stories](#) of the 2014 winners.

Inspire others with your own project! Deadline to [apply](#) is Oct. 3, 2014.



To stay current on all things [Take Care of Texas](#), like us on [Facebook](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).