



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

# Iowa DNR News

Environmental Services

## Top three ways to handle fall leaves

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DES MOINES -- Fall leaves are beautiful – until they pile up in your yard. Don't send those precious nutrients up in smoke. Instead, put those nuisance leaf piles to good use. Leaves, small branches and other landscape materials can nourish your lawn, garden or community. It's easy:

1. **Compost.** Composting leaves and food scraps is a great way to turn this waste into garden nutrients. A good compost mix needs both carbon (dead or dry leaves) and nitrogen (green materials like food scraps and grass clippings). Many types and sizes of compost containers are available. For tips on low-tech ways to compost, see a [DNR tutorial](#).
2. **Mulch.** Your lawn will love you if you chop up and leave your leaves in place. Leaves are a free, natural fertilizer that enriches your soil with organic matter. You can use your regular lawn mower. Or, use a mulching lawn mower to shred and mix leaves and grass into your yard.
3. **Bag it.** If you have too many leaves or branches to compost, check with your community to see if they collect yard waste or have a drop-off site. Sometimes there's a fee, but the upside is that anyone can pick up composted materials for their yards or gardens.

For some, burning leaves seems to capture the nostalgic smell of autumn. But breathing [leaf smoke](#) pulls pollutants such as carbon monoxide, soot and toxic chemicals into your lungs. While it may smell good, smoke is especially harmful to children, the elderly, and those with respiratory or heart problems. Turning leaves into nutrients is the healthy way to protect your and your neighbor's lungs.