

Ah, No More Rakes or Leaf Bags

By Liz Gibbons

As the daylight hours grow shorter and the nights become cooler, Mother Nature delights our senses with her fiery display of yellow, gold, and red leaves. This year as I watch the autumn leaves float to the ground on a gentle breeze or rush past me on windy, gusty days, I feel fortunate that I do not have to deal with fallen leaves this year.

My yard in Atlanta had eleven mature deciduous trees which included several species of oak and maple and a few hazelnut trees plus two towering pine trees which were prolific in their production of pine cones.

The first year that I had to hire lawn care I accepted the expense for mowing, but in the fall when there was the added expense of disposing of all the leaves, I began to tell myself, "There has to be a better way."

I reflected on forests vs. landscaping. Ah, yes, the difference was that we humans have lawns and deep piles of leaves smother grass. Remembering my botany classes from college, I knew that leaves are designed to decompose and in doing so provide fertilizer to the trees as well as provide shelter over the winter for caterpillars and pupa which become butterflies and moths. Leaves also shelter insects which provide food for songbirds the next spring, and they provide nutrients for microbes which enrich the soil's fertility. However, we silly humans burn or bag these valuable resources, and then in the spring we purchase fertilizer and mulch at our local garden shop along with more leaf bags.

For the past several years, being a little older and hopefully wiser, I hired the two teen-aged boys who lived next door to blow the leaves into piles surrounding the base of the trees and to spread some of them over my garden. This worked out pretty well and was less expensive.

But that is all in the past. I gladly left my rakes and leaf bags in my garage for the new owners to deal with the challenge of all those leaves. What a freeing feeling that was.