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## **Fall Leaves – Pretty, But Also Practical**

Fall color in trees is right around the corner, but some trees might end up being disappointingly dull. Most of the time, it's not the tree's fault. Fall color has many determining factors, but the one that plays the biggest role is actually the amount of sunlight the tree gets in the two weeks prior to color change. If the sunlight is frequent and intense, the fall color will be as well. This is because the tree spikes photosynthesis as a last effort to produce as many sugars as possible for dormancy. If instead, the weather remains cloudy or rainy, fewer sugars are produced, and the leaves will be a paler color. While this can be disappointing for those of us who enjoy bright fall leaves, this won't negatively impact the long-term health of the tree in any meaningful way.

Fall is recommended as the best time to buy and plant trees, one of the reasons being the opportunity to see the fall color of a tree before purchase. While keeping in mind the previous facts about weather's impact on fall color, trees that still show bright fall color after marginal weather will likely always show that color. However, this should not be the only reason why you opt for an individual tree. Susceptibility to leaf diseases will impact how many leaves the tree will have come autumn, and you should not ignore structure issues or other red flags just because the leaves have good fall color. Tree selection relies on a combination of factors, of which color is one of lesser importance. If you're looking for trees that default to stronger fall colors, look for red and sugar maples, sweetgums, ginkgo's, black gum, and serviceberries.

Downed leaves provide a good organic matter source for compost bins or mulch in the yard, but it's important to not overapply leaves in either scenario. Compost requires three parts brown matter to one-part green matter, so although there will be plenty of leaves, you cannot leave green organic matter like grass clippings out of the formula. The best way to use leaves in compost is to mow your yard once some of the leaves have fallen and bag the clippings, depositing them in a compost bin or pile once the bag fills. This will give you a rough 3:1 ratio and cut the organic matter up into smaller pieces, which will help the compost break down faster. If you don't compost, remove the bag from your mower, and mowing over the leaves will mulch your yard with the broken-up pieces of the leaves. Be aware that too much mulch will build up the thatch of the yard, which can cause root health issues, so you will want to only mow over some of the leaves, especially if leaves pile up quickly in the fall months.

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