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Fall Yard Clean-Up

Even though we have had our first snow of the year, there is still time to clean up the landscape! I am sure by now the trees in your yard have started to lose their leaves or have already lost them all. Now is the time to stop and think about options for handling the leaf litter. Although a scattering of leaves will not harm the lawn, the excessive cover of leaves for an extended period will prevent sunlight from reaching the turfgrass causing the grass to be unable to make the carbohydrates needed to survive the winter.

There are other options for dealing with the fallen leaves rather than bagging them up and putting them out for the trash collector. The first option is composting. Composting is a great way to handle the refuse. The compost can then be added to your vegetable garden and/or flowerbeds, to increase the amount of organic material in your soil.

Another option is to mow the leaves with a mulching mower and let shredded leaves filter into the turf canopy. (A side-discharge mower will also work, but it will not shred the leaves as thoroughly). This method will be most effective if you do it often enough that leaf litter does not become too thick. Be sure to mow while you can still see grass peeking through the leaves.

While you are working to keep the leaves from piling up on your turf, you can also decide what needs to be cleaned up in your flowerbeds.

Fall is traditionally a time for cleaning up flowerbeds. Normally, we recommend cutting down dead stems to help control insect and disease problems. But, with herbaceous perennials that have been pest free, you might want to consider leaving some to provide winter interest to your garden. For example, ornamental grasses can be attractive even during the winter months. But those near structures like your house or sheds should be cut to the ground because when they get dry, they could be a fire hazard. Perennials with evergreen or semi-evergreen foliage can provide color and structure.

Foliage can be left for a few other reasons as well. For instance, foliage left on semi-hardy plants will act as a mulch to protect from harsh winter winds and help to ensure overwintering of the plant's crowns. Another reason to leave some foliage in your beds is because of wildlife. Birds will eat seeds from the perennials, and others will use the plants as shelter. So, this fall take the time to look around your yard and see what you can do to prepare your landscape for the winter months.

If you have any questions feel free to stop by or contact me in the Washington office, 785-325-2121 or khatesohl@ksu.edu.