



A40 Making leafmould



Leafmould is a lovely crumbly dark organic material used for improving soil structure and as an invaluable ingredient for potting mixes. The leaves fall every year from deciduous trees and are easy and quick to collect as a group. Making leafmould is more about patience than technique, so producing leafmould is easy. The following tells you how to do it.

Resources

- Leaves to collect
- Suitable container
- Tools including spring tine rake, brush for hard surfaces, wheelbarrow, bags

Activity

- 1 Organise teams to collect leaves from your school grounds, preferably after rain so leaves are wet (see next page). It's easier to rake up little and often, rather than in one go where leaves are in thicker layers. Leaves can also kill grass if left on top for too long.
- 2 Put leaves in a container of your choice (see next page). Leafmould should be ready after 12 months to use for digging in (A26) and as mulch (A39), or after 24 months for using as an ingredient for potting mixes (A38).

Extended activity

- 1 Working in teams, nominate or ask for a volunteer to organise the group to rake up leaves. The group can review their performance together at the end.
- 2 Find out about other suitable containers for making leafmould, eg dumpy bags, hurdles made from willow or hazel, recycled pallets, etc.

Health & Safety

Keep a safe working distance apart. Keep your back as straight as possible when raking and take regular breaks. Be careful not to slip on wet leaves. Wear gloves for protection from blisters and potential contaminants and follow basic good hygiene practice following task completion.

See also Health and Safety Guidelines (Section SG1.2)

Further information

A26 Digging
A38 Making potting mixes
A39 Mulching plants
B5.7 Making compost
S4.4 Using leafmould

Top tip



Getting more leaves

Get permission to collect leaves from neighbours, local parks, cemeteries and other traffic-free areas. Be careful of dog muck.

Don't collect from areas with traffic where leaves may contain hazardous heavy metals. Also don't collect from forests as the trees rely on the nutrients from fallen leaves.

Instructions for making leafmould

Collecting leaves

Rake up fallen leaves from deciduous trees. Avoid evergreens as leaves are much tougher.

- Divide the space into small areas for each person, keeping a safe working distance apart.
- Rake or sweep leaves into manageable piles before collecting.
- Collect leaves by trapping between two boards to lift into a wheelbarrow or large bag.
- See also Health and Safety comments on first page.



Making leafmould

Put leaves into a cage. These are simple to make (see top tip). Make sure leaves are wet, watering if necessary. This is essential for decomposition.

To speed up decomposition, drag out leaves in late winter, waiting until spring if you find hibernating hedgehogs. Turn to add air. Also add a nitrogen rich 'activator' if practical, eg grass clippings or biotal compost maker for leaves available from www.organiccatalogue.com

Alternatively, fill plastic bags with wet leaves.

- Fill bags with piles of leaves.
- Use specially bought bag (pictured), dumpy bag, heavy duty black bin liners or compost bags with a hole at the base.
- Fold over and store bags out of the way until ready, making sure they don't dry out.



Top tip



Making a cage

Note: this is a typical design; yours may be a different size or shape, or on a hard surface.

- Measure 1m² on a bare piece of soil.
- At each corner, push in bamboo canes or hammer in sharpened posts (1.2m tall by 5cm²).
- Staple or nail 1m high chicken wire to three sides. Create a 'door' with the fourth side so you can remove the leafmould when ready.

