

Leafmould

Leafmould is a lovely compost to make in the autumn for use the next spring, or the spring after, depending on its rate of decomposition. Like other compost, it's made by rotting down a natural material but in this instance, it's just leaves on their own, rather than a mix of components.

Leafmould takes at least 6 months to make and can be used in different ways depending on how much it's rotted:

- partially rotted leaves can be used as a mulch around plants to help with water retention during the summer, to protect the ground from rain in the winter
- well-rotted – completed brown and crumbled – leafmould can be used to sow seeds and take plant cuttings. Because leafmould is not rich in nutrients like garden compost, it's perfect for sowing seeds which have their own nutrients. It's also quite lightweight, rather than the heavier textured compost from our home compost bins, which is not so suitable for seeds or cuttings.
- well-rotted leafmould can be combined with soil or compost and sand or grit for potted plants

For your leafmould, it's best to use leaves from deciduous trees. That is, trees that lose their leaves in the autumn rather than staying on the tree. Leaves from evergreen trees or shrubs are usable but will take longer to rot, so if you are using them too, maybe keep the two types separate. You can also use the leaves from trees you are pruning, if you are patient enough to take them off the branches or twigs as you don't want to include these because they will take too long to decompose.

You can of course just add leaves to your normal compost if you don't wish to compost them separately to specifically make leafmould. Interesting fact (if you're a composting nerd), even though most leaves are green, they are regarded as 'browns' in composting terms as they are high in carbon. Do check out the separate chapter on composting.

By the way, if you don't want to make leafmould, don't worry about leaving the leaves in your garden where they are – this is what nature does in the woods where they rot and feed the soil. You can also rake them into the borders where they will provide shelter for insects for birds to eat, food for worms and for the soil, and precious hedgehogs might use them to hibernate. No need to use leaf blowers 😊

There are different ways to turn leaves into leafmould, here's three easy ones.

1. A simple wire mesh leafmould bin

You will need mesh wire (chicken wire) and string as well as twigs, soil, and of course leaves.

1. Bend the wire to form a tube and secure with a few pieces of knotted string.
2. Place somewhere outdoors where it's out of the way.*
3. Add some twiggy bits to the bottom, then a little garden soil.
4. Fill with leaves from deciduous trees.
5. Leave until crumbly, taking up to a year.

* preferably not where a neighbouring shrub will grow into it like mine shown here!



Twiggly base



Fill with leaves



Decomposition



One-year old leafmould

2. A conventional compost bin

The bin below was original completely filled up with various deciduous trees' leaves in October (no photo). The photos show partial decomposition the next May, followed by the next October, a full year later. The leafmould make a lovely mulch but was still too chunky for sowing seeds.



After 7 months



After a year

3. Leafmould in plastic bags

The plastic bag method proved the speediest! Leaves were collected in a previously used compost bag, holes poked for air, in October and lovely leafmould compost was ready just 5 months later.



1 Leaves bagged up Oct 2019



2. Tie up and poke holes in plastic



3. March 2020 lovely compost

Easy, free compost, what's not to like?