**Leaf mulch: Nature’s natural fertilizer**

Fall is here and that means watching football, eating crisp apples, admiring changing leaf colors and. . .raking and bagging those leaves.

But hold on! You can reduce your time spent raking, save money and give nature a helping hand when you ‘bag the leaf bags.’ Simply attach your catcher bag to the lawnmower and mow right over all the leaves. When the bag fills, remove it and spread the mulched leaves under your trees and over your planting beds up to two inches thick. Do not cover existing plants.

Putting mulch around trees and shrubs helps them retain moisture. And over the course of the winter and spring, the leaves will break down to improve your soil.

Here are some other tips to prepare your garden for winter:

* Winter can be very dry, so water your garden thoroughly before the ground freezes. This is particularly important for evergreen trees and shrubs that need water for their leaves year round.
* Cut back perennials, especially tall ones that are drooping to about eight inches above the ground. Leave others, such as native grasses and coneflowers, for example, to provide visual interest and food for birds during the winter.
* If you have a compost bin or pile, add some of your shredded leaves to that.