**The Garden Corner**
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This has been a beautiful fall in our part of Missouri. And a bonus is coming! According to local meteorologists we’re going to have a spectacular display of color from the leaves above. That is, if we don’t get a hard-killing freeze first. One thing is for sure. Summer’s shady canopy is about to be on the ground. If you have no plans on how to win this annual skirmish, might I suggest a few ideas.

Decaying leaves are nature’s way of restoring the soil. Anything we can do to help that abundance return to its origin is probably good for everybody all around. Almost all of the flower beds at Hidden Harbor Park are resupplied with leaves this time of year. What kind of leaf matter depends upon the area being improved. In the vegetable garden and throughout the blackberry and raspberry patches, whole leaves are raked or dumped in a thick coating. I’ve never measured it. Maybe six to eight inches deep. On a warm, fall day, when you don’t have anything better to do, crank the tiller and till the leaves in. I know you’re not going to believe this! But, most of that thick layer of leaves with have turned to nice, rich dirt come spring.

That’s an idea for the whole leaf. What can you do with the leaves you have mowed over? These smaller pieces will break down much quicker and are good candidates for addition to a leaf mulch pile. If you have the equipment, a shredder breaks the leaves into much smaller pieces. Once you have your shredded leaf pile, dampen it and forget about it until spring. Yes! I use to turn the pile a couple of times during the winter. I don’t think it matters if you do, or don’t. Magically, those leaves are going to become leaf mold by spring. This nutritious nugget of deliciousness is loved by all plants. (A word of caution: Leaf mold does lean toward being a little acid. Just so you know.) Dig it into the soil or side dress, and the living world will rejoice. Not including manure in the discussion; there is really only one thing better and that’s compost.

We’ll have to save how to do compost for another time. However, this first. If you use your leaves for compost remember the leaves are your carbon and you need a ton of “green” for it to work. OR! You could go to the Sedalia Biosolids Compost Facility and get a yard of compost for about eleven dollars. How much is a yard? It will fill a standard sized pickup bed.

Questions/comments/suggestions? Write: 370 NW 121 Rd., Warrensburg, MO 64093 or email: maandpak@embarqmail.com and I’ll get back with you. Hope everyone has a great Thanksgiving!