

Winter Garden Maintenance Fact Sheet 2022

Please **Leave the Leaves** for winter. Instead of raking, bagging and throwing them away, consider the benefits of a messy winter garden. The uncut perennial branches and dried leaves give many creatures valuable shelter.

Leaf coverage and other plant material can preserve soil moisture and nutrients, help suppress weeds, and provide habitat and resources for garden life. Here's how leaving planting material over winter can benefit life in the garden:

- **Creating Shelter:** Your garden can provide habitat for bees and butterflies over winter. Bumble bees often make their homes for the winter in loose leaf litter. You might also find some butterflies who hibernate in your garden, using rolled up leaves or plant stalks.
- **Providing Nutrients:** Plant litter is a great food source for foraging birds. The bugs living in the plant material can help them through the winter as they raise their chicks. The standing stems offer a great forage site too.
- Leaf litter breaks down acting as an organic fertilizer for perennials getting ready to recharge for next spring.
- Seeds from plants left behind can provide nutrition for over wintering birds

- **Nesting Sights:** Some insects lay their eggs on leaves throughout the winter. Leaving the litter undisturbed can allow them to grow and carry on their life cycle next spring. Native bees nest in undisturbed ground cavities and standing stalks
- **Most butterflies and moths overwinter in the larval stage, with pupae being the next most common choice, followed by eggs and adults. A few are capable of overwintering in more than one stage.**