



Don't Let Leaves Litter Lakes



(Photo credit: Minnesota Pollution Control Agency)

Leaves are natural—how can they be considered litter?! When leaves fall to the ground, they naturally decompose and restock the soil with nutrients and organic matter. But, what happens when there's no soil to land on? What happens to those nutrients when leaves land on streets and driveways where they can't be recycled into the soil? Here's the short answer: they litter the lake with pollution!

Without any natural soil to soak into, when it rains, nutrients released by decaying leaves are washed into runoff water which eventually ends up in lakes. Unfortunately, additional nutrients in a lake is not a good thing—the nutrient phosphorus fuels the growth of algae, including toxic algae. When algae blooms die off, decomposing organisms use up the oxygen in the water. When this happens, the lake and its native plant and animal inhabitants suffer—low oxygen can even kill fish.

The good news is you help prevent leaves from littering your favorite lake! Here's what you can do to turn leaf litter into treasure!

- Leaves make fantastic mulch for your lawn and garden! Use the mower to shred those leaves and leave them on the lawn to decompose and put that phosphorus back into the soil where it belongs. Add shredded or whole leaves right to your garden beds to suppress weeds, provide insulation, and nourish tired soil. It's free and your trees and veggies will thank you.

- If you want to go the extra mile, rake the leaves off your driveway (and street too!) and onto your lawn before it rains! This could reduce phosphorus in runoff by up to 60 percent, according to a study done by the University of Minnesota.
- Share your leaves! If you are not into gardening, some municipalities have yard waste and brush drop sites. Or, consider bagging up your leaves and dropping them off at your local community garden!

If leaves do get into the lake, it is best to leave them there—do not use a rake in the water to remove them. Raking the bottom disturbs the critters living in and on the lake bottom. Raking in the lake also suspends sediment and phosphorus into the water column, causing violations of state water quality standards and fueling algae blooms.

Thank you for doing your part to not let leaves litter lakes!

NH LAKES is the only statewide, member-supported nonprofit organization working to keep New Hampshire's lakes clean and healthy, now and in the future. The organization works with partners, promotes clean water policies and responsible use, and inspires the public to care for our lakes. For more lake-friendly tips, visit www.nhlakes.org, email info@nhlakes.org, or call 603.226.0299.

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