

Leave the Leaves *Outdoor Activity*

Objective:

To understand why it is important to leave the fallen leaves on the ground around homes, businesses, and schools.

Supplies:

- Plain white paper or paper plate
- Paper and writing utensil for notetaking
- Camera (optional)

Method:

1. Head outside to a space where you can find a layer of leaves on top of soil (try to avoid grass). The easiest place to look is next to a building where there are plants and shrubs.
2. Grab a handful of leaves and hold them above your paper or plate.
3. Gently shake the leaves and catch anything that falls using your paper or plate.
4. Make observations about what lands on the white surface. You can take notes, draw pictures, or use a camera to record your findings.
5. Try different locations and compare what you find at each location.

Further Questions:

- Did you find anything alive? Why or why not?
- What did you see that makes you think that leaving the leaves on the ground is important?



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The Importance of Leaving the Leaves

Leaves on the ground provide protection and food...

- Woolly bear caterpillars tuck themselves into a pile of leaves for protection from cold weather and predators
- Red-banded hairstreaks lay their eggs on fallen oak leaves, which become the first food of the caterpillars when they emerge
- Luna moths and swallowtail butterflies disguise their cocoons and chrysalises as dried leaves
- Mated queen bumble bees burrow only an inch or two into the earth to hibernate for winter
- Spiders, snails, worms, beetles, millipedes, mites, and more that live in the leaves provide food for chipmunks, turtles, birds, and amphibians
- Leaves provide valuable organic matter and build up healthy soil

How you can help:

- Pile leaves on garden beds or in the corners of yard spaces where they might be used by the animals that need this shelter
- Rake leaves into areas around trees, or use them as winter mulch to cover garden beds
- Share information about leaving leaves with your friends, neighbors, local business, and school officials

Source: The Xerces Society of Invertebrate Conservation, <https://xerces.org/>



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