Creating a Florida-Friendly Yard and Recycling Go Hand In Hand

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We love our trees here in Tallahassee. They are beautiful, green, and oxygen-giving. They define our community, which is bordered in many directions by canopy roads. But trees drop leaves in the fall. Even now, there is a continuous fall of pine needles and other bounty on my lawn, driveway, and paths. You can consider this an annoyance, or do what I do and put on my earth-friendly, responsible citizen, Master Gardener hat, and remind myself that those pine needles and leaves are real gold for my yard. They’re just the stuff I need to complete my compost pile or rejuvenate those large mulched areas that make my yard “Florida Friendly.”

Think about the natural forest floor. It’s not bare soil. The leaves create a natural mulched area that recycles nutrients, protects the tree roots, and keeps the soil from washing away. We need to take a lesson from nature.

Creating less lawn and more mulched areas is a “Florida friendly” principle. It reduces mowing and maintenance. We have experienced severe drought this year, and I would be remiss if I didn’t mention the benefits of keeping 2-3 inches of mulch on your plants. In addition to the many other benefits, mulch helps the soil retain moisture and reduces the need for watering.

Time turns those needles and leaves to gold. They hold stored up nutrients that will enrich your soil as they decompose. This is recycling at its best. While some people actually like raking (why go to the gym and lift weights when you can get exercise being productive), I would not be one of those people. A little raking is fine with me, but I’m in love with my blower and I use a mower that either mulches or bags. With a combination of these I can pretty easily move this new crop of needles or leaves into my
bedded areas. If you have shaded areas where the lawn won’t grow, use the mulch there also. It will keep the soil from eroding away and exposing tree roots.

I often see people bag up their pine straw because is has leaves in it. This truly confuses me because you have to buy pine straw, and in quantity, it’s not cheap. And after it’s been on the ground in Tallahassee for about 2 hours it will have leaves in it anyway, even if it didn’t when you first put it down. Over a period of years I am rather proud to say that much of my one-acre yard is mulched and 90% of that mulch comes from my own yard, hardwood leaves and all.

Rethink bagging leaves and pine straw and leaving it for the waste collectors to pick up. It’s a lot of work. It’s a waste of free fertilizer for your garden, bedded areas, shrubs and trees. And because the waste collectors don’t know exactly what’s in that bag, it goes into the class three landfill along with the rest of your household garbage. Think about how many trees we have in our community alone, and consider recycling those leaves in your own yard by composting them or simply using them as mulch. Your yard and your community will be very glad you did.

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