

What we do with fallen leaves in the fall in our community can have huge impacts on wildlife in the spring. When leaves are collected and thrown away or sent to the landfill in the fall, we eliminate an important overwintering microhabitat for caterpillars, salamanders, fireflies and other local wildlife in addition to disrupting the ecosystem.

Have you ever wondered where butterflies go in winter? The answer is right underfoot. Butterflies and moths may overwinter in the leaves as caterpillars, chrysalises, or even in their adult forms, depending on the species. When leaves are raked into a yard waste bag, up to 45% of a yard's butterflies are thrown away!

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency leaves and other yard debris account for more than 12 percent of the nation's solid waste—with more than a whopping 10 million tons buried in landfills every year. Without enough oxygen to decompose, this organic matter releases the greenhouse gas methane into our atmosphere.

Fallen leaves can be moved from turf areas to appropriate garden beds and around the bases of trees to create a three to five inches deep natural mulch where wildlife can overwinter and plants can benefit from their nutrients. Or they can be composted and returned to help build our soils.

Thank you for taking action to make sure our local ordinances and/or regulations do not prohibit us from leaving the leaves when they fall in residential and commercial landscapes and in public outdoor spaces, but are used to provide habitat for local wildlife and do not end up in the landfill. Sincerely,

Stephen Ghostley
National Wildlife Federation Action Fund