

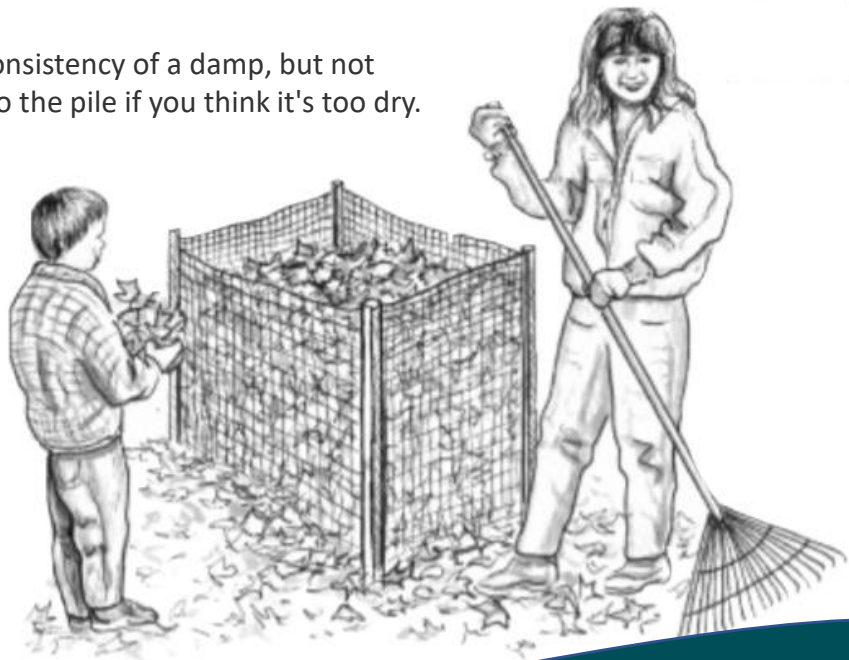
## A New Lease on Leaves

Make the most of fallen leaves! Thousands of bags of leaves get tossed into already overcrowded landfill sites every fall. You may be surprised to learn that composted leaves can make a mineral-rich fertilizer or mulch for your garden. It couldn't be easier. Create a container to collect leaves in your backyard or schoolyard and start making mulch to perk up unhealthy habitats!

1. Construct one or more simple bins to contain the leaves. As it takes about two years before leaves thoroughly decompose, it makes sense to start a new bin or bins each fall.
2. Use chicken wire or some other mesh material for the sides. No cover or bottom is required. Unlike compost, leaves don't need warmth to decompose.
3. Leaves should be moist when put in the bin. Collect them after rain or sprinkle them with a hose. Use deciduous leaves only. (Note that some children are allergic to leaf mould.)
4. To speed up the decomposition process, mix in fresh grass clippings. Bacteria in the grass will help the pile rot within a year. (Try adding clippings to one bin, but not to another, then compare the results.)
5. The compost is ready when it has transformed into a dark brown, coarse material. Spread it as a mulch, dig it into the soil, or mix it with organic fertilizer. (Try another control test, comparing plant growth both with and without the leaf-compost mixture.)

### Additional Tips

- The compost heap should be the consistency of a damp, but not soggy, sponge. You can add water to the pile if you think it's too dry.
- You can cover the compost heap with black plastic to keep out heavy rain, protect it from scavengers, and retain warmth and moisture
- Turn the compost periodically with a pitchfork to speed up the process. Don't panic if you are unable to do this; the pile will still eventually become "rich" soil - ready for use in your backyard habitat.



For additional resources visit:

[CanadianWildlifeFederation.ca/Education](http://CanadianWildlifeFederation.ca/Education)