

Gas Leaf Blowers – A Serious Concern by Sian Nimkoff

In a perfect world there would be no leaf blowers, the mighty rake and broom would once again take center stage. Alas, we do not live in a perfect world and the ubiquitous gas leaf blower (GLB) reigns supreme. There are numerous and serious downfalls of the GLB.

- 1) **Noise pollution:** Noise from popular models of commercial GLB exceeds 100 decibels at point of operation and, according to CDC, prolonged exposure at approximately 85 decibels leads to hearing loss. GLB emit low frequency noise, which has a greater penetrating power than high frequency. It, therefore, carries over long distances, affecting entire neighborhoods. Low frequencies permeate concrete walls, houses, and hearing protection devices giving the operator a false sense of security when it comes to protecting their hearing from hearing loss and tinnitus.
- 2) **Respiratory pollution:** Blowing air at an astonishing 200mph these blowers, according to the Department of Environmental Conservation, stir up clouds of dust that contain pollen, mold, animal feces, heavy metals and chemicals from herbicides and pesticides. Additionally, these devices are powered by mixing gasoline and oil, which emit carbon monoxide and cancer causing fine particulate matter that suspend in the air for minutes at a time in close proximity to the airways of the operator and passersby.
- 3) **Environmental pollution:** An independent laboratory study showed that operating a two-stroke GLB for 30 minutes emits pollutants equal to those generated by driving a Ford F-150 truck 3,877 miles, as far as Texas to Alaska! Whereas the automotive industry has, through years of regulation, been able to dramatically reduced emission not so in the small off-road engine sector in which the GLB belongs.
- 4) **Pollinator Damage:** The leaf layer is its own mini ecosystem, providing habitat for overwinter insect larvae and eggs. You might put out the best bird food over the winter but if there are not enough insects, specifically caterpillars, hatching out in the spring/summer then those birds have nothing to feed their hatchling since 98% of our birds feed insects to their young. Did you know that one in three bites of food that you eat is thanks to our pollinators? Removing the leaf litter from your property essentially removes habitat for those precious pollinators that are essential to our food supply.
- 5) **Soil Degradation:** Removing leaves from wooded areas and flowerbeds leaves the ground exposed to run off, topsoil erosion, compacted soil and increases the exposed real estate for invasive plant species seeds.

So, what's a homeowner to do? Undoubtedly leaves on the lawn can smother and damage the grass. If raking and placing the piles of leaves on another part of one's property is not an option there are other alternatives. An organization called Leave Leaves Alone! <https://www.leaveleavesalone.org/> recommends mulch mowing and is a great resource to look into. Battery operated leaf blowers whilst not a panacea, have less of an impact in all areas noted above compared to GLB.

Whatever you, or your landscaping company's leaf blower practices are I hope this article will encourage you to banish the GLB from center stage!