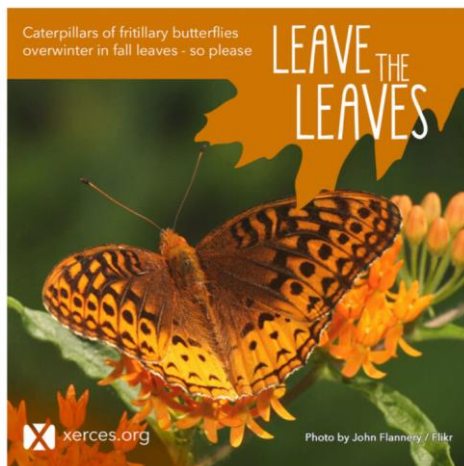


## Please Leave the Leaves by Sian Nimkoff and Holly Kocet



**Caterpillars of fritillary butterflies overwinter in fall leaves – so please Leave the Leaves**

Leaves are important cover for protecting overwintering insects such as fireflies, bumble bee queens, and many butterfly species. To help our beneficial insect populations, which are in serious decline, leave the leaves whenever possible.

Mulching leaves on lawn areas will prevent leaves from smothering your lawn. Best to leave garden areas alone until spring. Leaves should be left as they fall in perennial and shrub beds, under tree canopies, and on ground covers. Not only will leaves help preserve beneficial insects but leaves will also protect your plants from desiccation caused by lack of winter moisture and the freezing and thawing that occurs late winter.

Mulching the leaves on your lawn has many advantages:

1) It reduces noise and greenhouse gases from gas-powered leaf blowers. 2) Mulched/shredded leaf material creates valuable compost which enriches topsoil. This leaf material is a natural fertilizer that will save you time and money. 3) Leaf mulching also limits the spreading of dust and other contaminants into the air, kicked up by leaf blowers.

### Gas-Powered Leaf Blowers Cause Serious Problems

**Noise Pollution** – Gas-powered leaf blowers emit low frequency noise that is carried over long distances, affecting entire neighborhoods.

**Health Issues** – Blowers stir up harmful materials such as mold, animal feces, heavy metals and pesticides which contribute to asthma and other **respiratory illnesses**. Prolonged exposure to commercial blowers can cause **hearing loss** even when operator is using ear protection.

**Environmental Concerns** – Blowers emit massive amounts of **pollutants into the air** with no government emission standards as required for road vehicle engines.

**Threat to Pollinators and Beneficial Insects** - Blowing leaves disturbs and kills insects present on and under leaves in many stages of development.

**Soil Degradation** - Removing leaves exposes soil to erosion, soil compaction, and opportunity for invasive plants to gain a foothold.

### 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: leads to hearing Noise from popular models of commercial GLB exceeds 100 decibels at point of operation and, according to CDC, prolonged exposure at approximately 85 decibels 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!