

# Why Use Leaves as Mulch in the Ornamental Garden? It's all about the soil.

**Our native woodland forest is a good model.**

**Surface Litter**

High-carbon content leaves, branches & surface litter; mushrooms, animal scat & dead bodies.

**Topsoil**

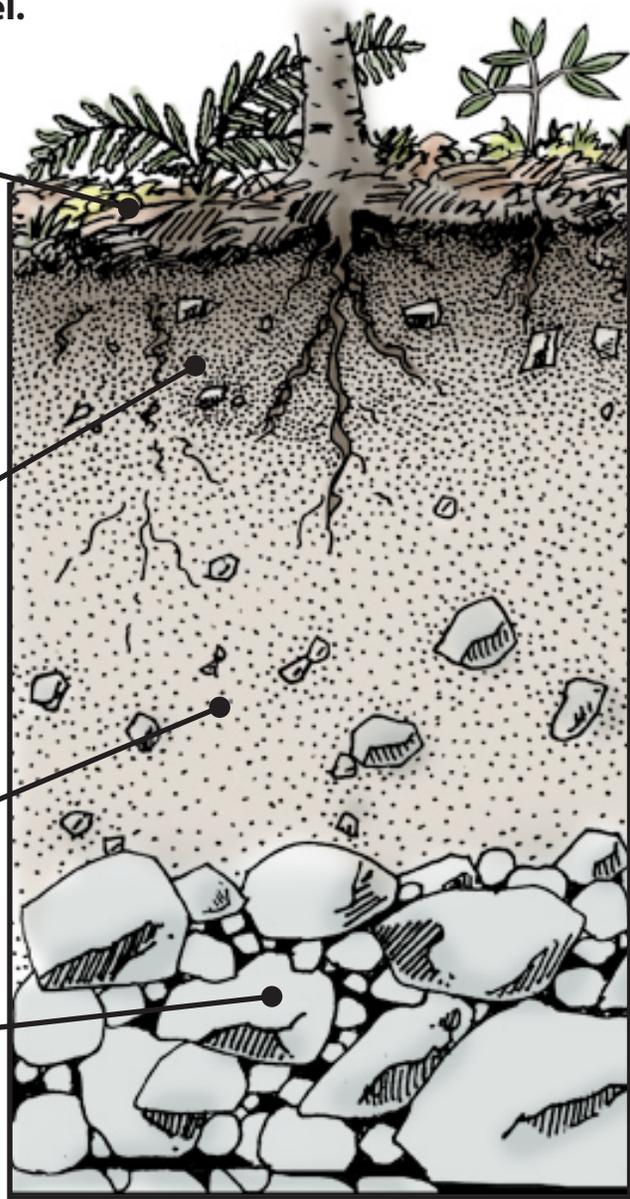
Surface litter is turned into high-nitrogen compost & humus by fungi & bacteria; minerals from weathering rocks.

**Native Subsoil**

Crumbling rock, sand, clay, gravel, silt.

**Bedrock**

Parent rock material underlying soil layers.



In an ornamental garden, composed of woody plants and perennials, the use of fall leaves as mulch is encouraged because these leaves have high carbon content which does a good job preventing weed seed germination. And during the year that follows, the leaves are decomposed by fungi and bacteria releasing nitrogen that feeds the garden naturally.

All soils have both fungi and bacteria in them. Either one's dominance supports specific plant communities & growing conditions. Gardens composed of woody plants and perennials need fungi-dominant soil. A thick layer of high-carbon mulch, particularly in the form of fall leaves is perfect for supporting fungi. Make sure your ornamental beds contain 1/3 – 1/2 deciduous plants, then let the fall leaves stay on the ground to compost naturally. You get mulch and compost—for free—compliments of Mother Nature!

**Natural Woodland & Ornamental Garden Soils**

Have higher fungi content which produces nitrogen in the form of AMMONIUM which:

Is used by plants' woody & root structures.

Is used in COLDER temperatures.

LOWER pH & many if not most of our regional woody plants prefer acid soil which, luckily, is what we mostly have.

STICKS to the soil particles so is NOT leached away by rain or irrigation if unused by the plants.

Support these types of plants:

- Trees
- Shrubs
- Perennials

AMMONIUM is later converted into NITRATE to be used by plants' leafy structures.

**Turf Lawn, Vegetable & Annual Garden Soils**

Have higher bacteria content which produces nitrogen in the form of NITRATE which:

Is used by plants' leafy structures.

Is used in WARMER temperatures.

RAISE pH & most lawn grass and vegetables prefer neutral soils which can be problematic in our naturally acidic soil.

Does NOT STICK to the soil particles & IS leached away by rain or irrigation causing pollution in the watershed.

Support these types of plants:

- Turf grass lawn
- Vegetable gardens
- Annuals