

Rodney StJohn

Subject: Leaves Leaves Everywhere....

Now that the leaves are in full bloom, I thought I'd drop you a quick note to talk about tree leaf disposal....particularly mulching leaves.

Quite a few people have recently asked me if they should mulch up their leaves with their mulching mower and leave (*pun intended*) them in the turf area. Several studies at Michigan State, Cornell, Rutgers and Purdue have concluded that mulching tree leaves into turf will not harm healthy turf and can be an easy, cost-effective way to dispose of your leaves. You can read the Purdue research report titled, "Leaf Mulching Effects on Turf Performance" at <http://www.agry.purdue.edu/turf/report/1999/page24.htm> And rather than retying all of Dr. Reicher's other comments about the study you can read more about the study and the results in an article at Grounds Maintenance Magazine, titled, "Mulching Tree Leaves: An Alternative to Disposal" at http://www.grounds-mag.com/mag/grounds_maintenance_mulching_tree_leaves/

Ok, so now that I've told you it's ok to mulch up your leaves with your mulching mower, let me make a couple of statements regarding safety and performance of your mower.

- Remember, a good sharp blade is better a cutting grass than a dull one. The same is true for mulching leaves. Use a sharp blade to ensure that the mower will correctly mulch the leaves and without causing undue strain on the mechanical parts of your mower.
- I said it is safe to mulch leaves....**NOT** sticks or branches or even garbage. Make sure you walk the area over, kicking up leaves and looking for fallen sticks, cans and bottles, or other litter buried under the leaves. Hitting these types of objects can possibly damage your mower, or kill or injure yourself or others nearby.
- You should already be wearing eye and ear protection when you are mowing, but you may want to wear a dust mask when you mulch....Mulching dry leaves tends to be a very dusty and dirty job.
- Dry leaves are easiest to mulch. Some prefer a little moisture in the leaves to keep dust down, but **Do Not** mulch wet or soggy leaves.
- Remember to inspect and clean your air filter on the mower.
- Follow the same type of thought pattern as the 1/3 rule for mowing grass. Don't try to mulch too many leaves at once. There are limitations as to how much leaf debris your mower can mulch and mulching too much at one time can damage your mower, injure yourself, and/or create mulch with less-than-optimal sized particles. Just like mowing this may mean you have to get out there and mulch more often....not just once, after all the leaves have fallen off all the trees.

I hope you have a good rest of the fall and I look forward to seeing many of you at the Turf Conferences.

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