

Leaf Litter

THE MAGIC OF LEAVES

As I sit upon my perch and view the garden below, my home office is on the second floor, I stare in wonder at the falling leaves. This ever changing tapestry covering the lawn, a brocade carpet of luminescent orange, yellow and ochre in a few days, unless I am a diligent neighbour and dispose of them, will drift aimlessly around the neighbourhood.

These leaves belong to me, I won them and everyone in the neighbourhood knows this. The town, several years ago, decided that we needed street trees and of course I was in full agreeance until I was presented with the choices and promptly decided to lecture the works staff as to why they should not plant the nasty Norway maple on my road allowance.

In a small town everyone gets along and the works staff acquiesced to my request and decided not to plant the Norway Maples; they planted nothing instead. Today, six large Sugar Maples line the property, living on the street allowance. The town is happy; they had six extra trees that year to plant somewhere else and I have six large, beautiful, teenage Sugar Maples that I bought and planted and of course, all of their leaves are mine.

I watch in dismay as my neighbours do battle with leaves, not just mine but from their own giant trees in this old part of town. I wait patiently; the leaves move away one day and are back with friends the next. These friends are not mine, I notice Ash, Walnut and Beech gathering on the lawn and I know that they live down the street, the Beech at number 46, the Ash at number 57 and the Walnut on the empty lot. The neighbours are never sure however, if the Maple leaves on their lawn are mine, after all many Maples live on my street, even the dastardly Norway.

The battle lines are drawn and the persistent prevail. The rich fluffy brocade is eventually replaced with large plump clear plastic bags lining the streets. Clear cellophane packages sweating in the autumn sun waiting for the big red truck. To me it is the 'autumnal' funeral procession of nature's gifts as they are escorted to the local landfill. What a waste, for leaves have only completed part of

their duty when they fall from the trees, they still have much to offer.

Under the darkness of early morning I prowl the street in search of this treasure, of course I am sure the neighbours know this. The large eighty pound white dog that accompanies me is a dead give away, but each morning in a race with the big red truck I pilfer a bag as if it were gold and sequester in the back garden, waiting to release its contents to the compost pile when I return in the evening. Of course the leaves on my own lawn are much too good for this callous treatment inflicted by my neighbours.



Neighbours watch and wait, and shout across the street "that's a lot of leaves you got there", or the rare brave individual will volunteer to offer a leaf rake, thinking that I have misplaced mine or fear I do not own one. They don't know that I'm waiting; patience is needed in this solid, one-approach attack. The weather has to be right, preferably a slight drizzle, with no wind, and of course this all has to happen on a weekend. When the day finally arrives the neighbours I know view me with some pity as they, in their cosy living room book in hand, gaze across the street. They think to themselves I'm sure "if he had done that last week when the leaves were dry he could have had them all bagged by now". Instead I rake and gather them into the garden beds, spreading them as evenly as possible.

The rain gently glues them all together in their final resting place. Where, by late spring, they will have disappeared only to be replaced by a flourishing garden. When the neighbours ask "What fertilizer do you use?" As they stand in the shadow of my 12' daffodils, and I say "none". They leave in mild disgust fearing, as a professional, I am forbidden from revealing some minor hidden horticultural trade secret.

The magic of leaves is the backbone of my garden; it is the only nourishment needed and they nourish my plants until another carpet is laid over them.

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