

What's In Your Leaf Pile?

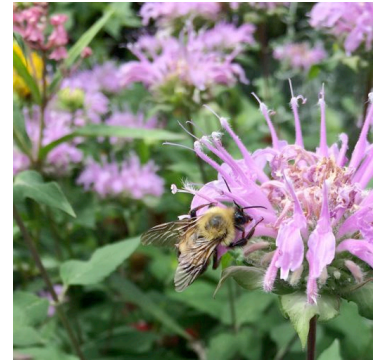


Luna Moth cocoon secured to oak leaf. Photo courtesy of J. Gibson

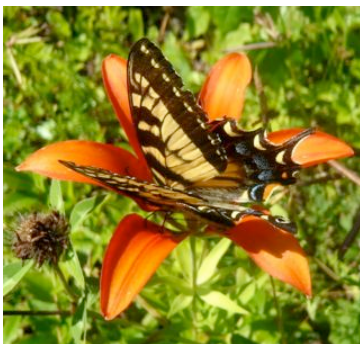
Many beneficial (and beautiful) insects overwinter in our yards. For instance, the Katydid (important food source for birds during late summer) and Preying Mantis overwinter as eggs attached to twigs, stems, and/or leaves. Ladybugs also spend the winter in our gardens. Native bees find winter homes in soil, plants (stems, under grasses), and leaves. Removing all litter in the fall reduces these insect populations, most of which are beneficial. According to the University of Maine, 97% of insects in our yards are beneficial (<http://umaine.edu/publications/7150e/>). Many of these insects are critical food sources for migrating birds and for birds raising their young. 95% of birds feed insects to their young even if the adults eat seeds (Tallamy, *Bringing Nature Home*).

Keeping your healthy leaves either as garden mulch or in piles under trees or shrubs will offer you many benefits over the year:

- feed microorganisms which feed your plants (there are complicated relationships under ground); these organisms in turn clean the water and air and improve soil texture
- keep water levels stable--absorbs more water, drains better, and keeps moisture available to your plants through drought(lots of seeming contradictions but it's true)
- mulch your garden through the winter
- provide cover for overwintering bees, butterflies, moths, and other beneficial insects
- provide food for those above creatures provides food for birds
- reduce the need to buy bags of mulch or compost (and then the associated pollution and costs connected to those items (plastic bags, transportation))
- reduce pressure on finances and resources of the village; money saved there could go to more positive uses



Bumblebee queens overwinter in leaf litter or the top inch or so of soil. They are critical pollinators



For further reading: *Life in the Soil: A Guide for Naturalists and Gardeners*, James B. Nardi

Teaming with Microbes: The Organic Gardener's Guide to the Soil Food Web, Revised Edition, Lowenfels and Lewis

Easter Tiger Swallowtail: overwinters in chrysalis attached to stems usually but could attach to a leaf. Host plants are many kinds of trees: Ashes, Tulip Tree, Magnolias, Black Cherry, Birch, Willow).