Autumn is Here:

How to Start Composting Leaves, from Backyards to Municipalities

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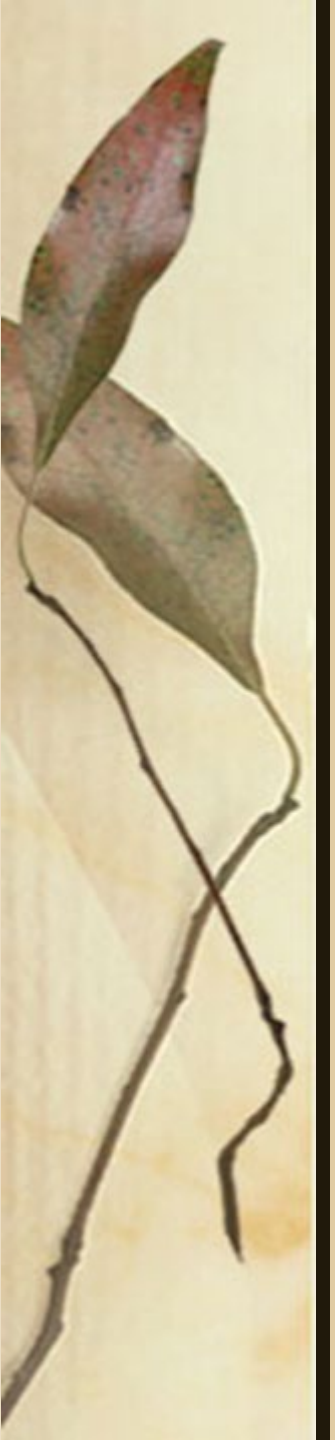
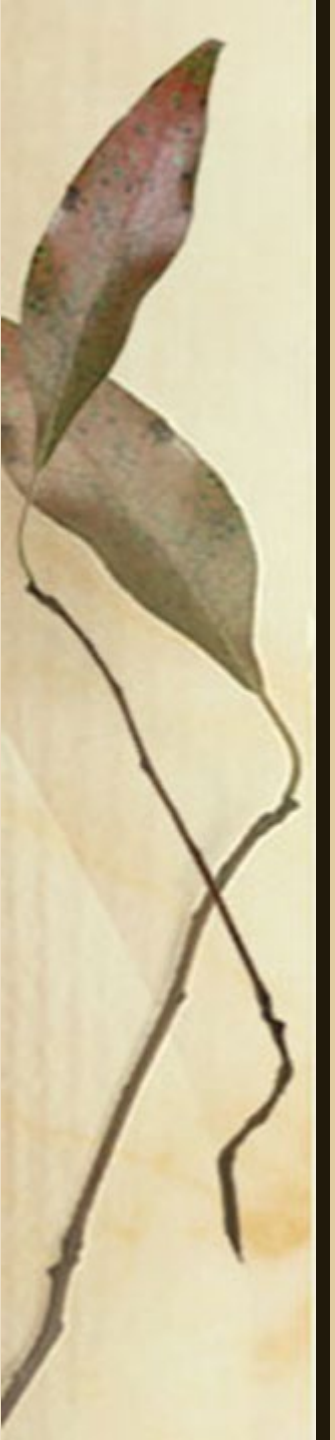
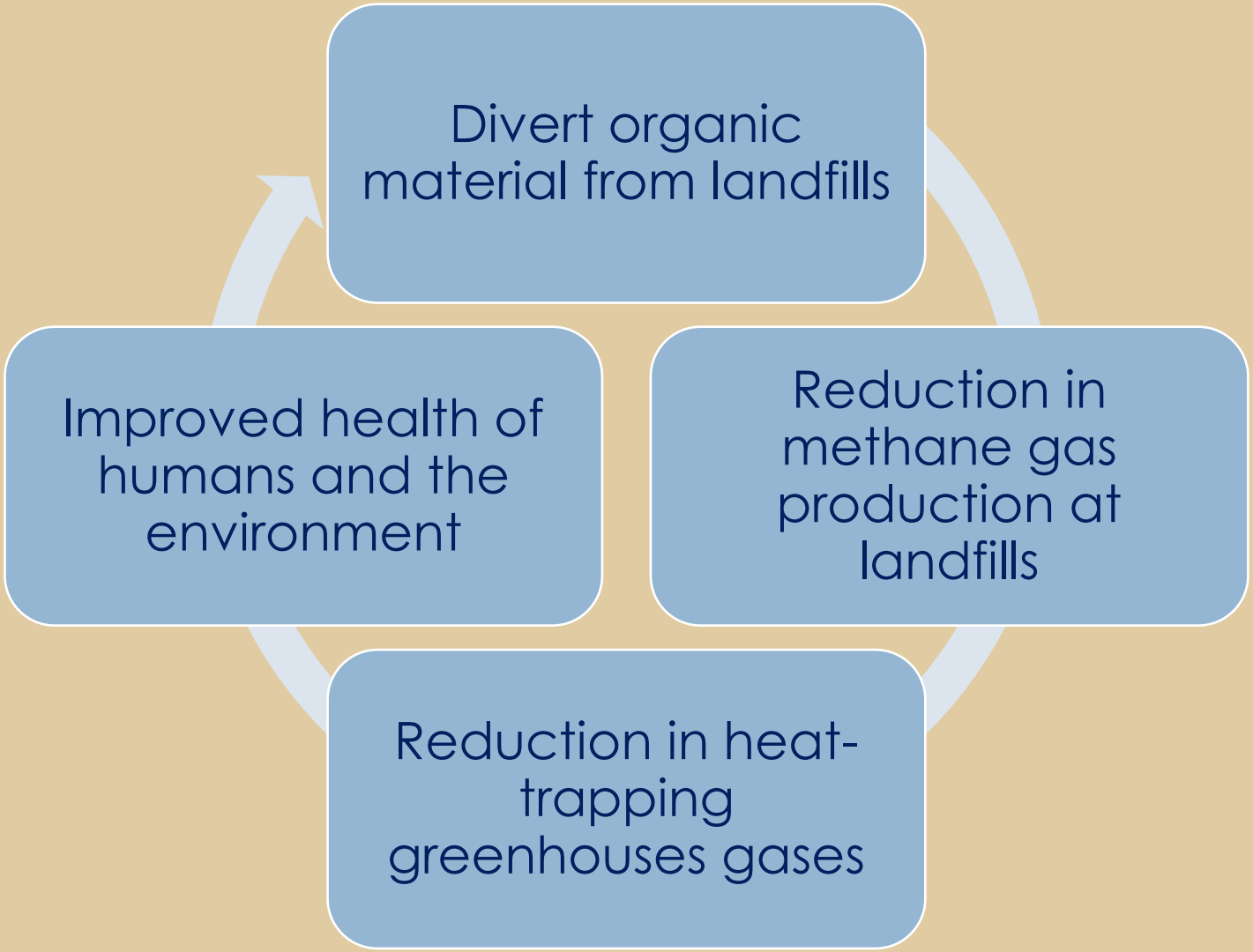
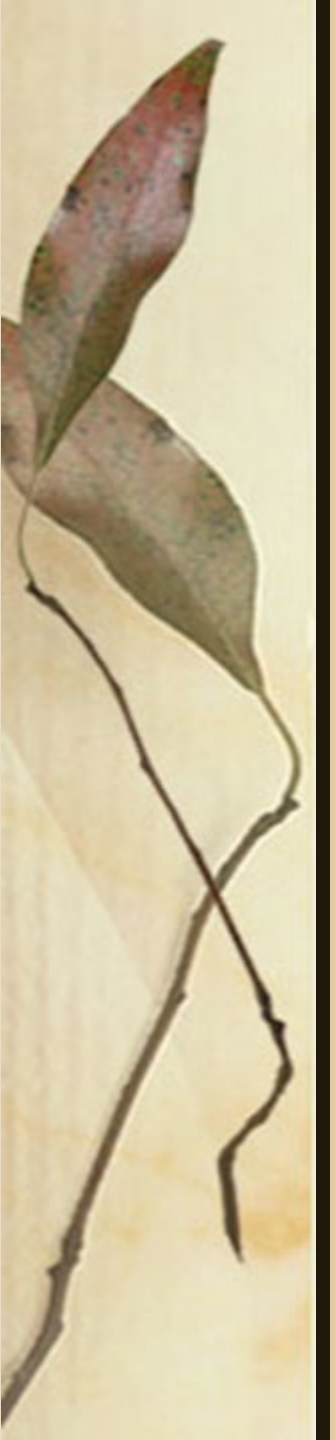


What we will cover:

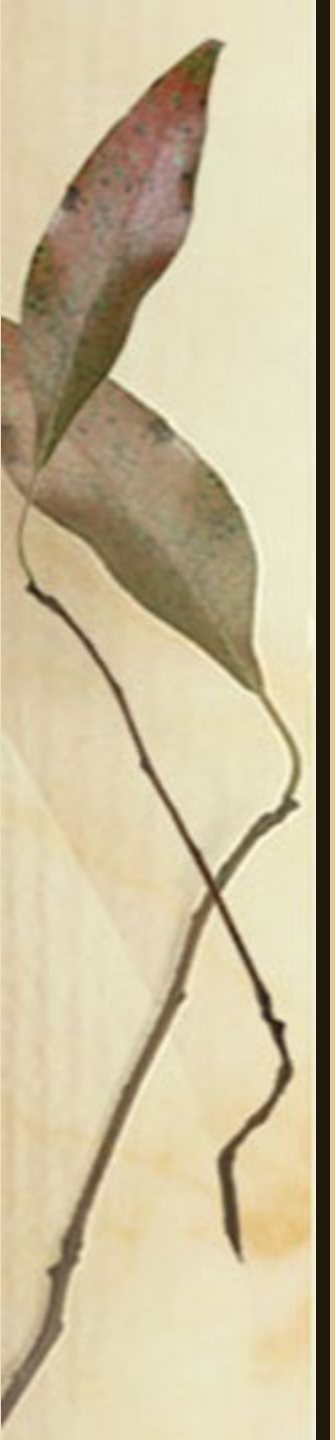
- Why composting leaves is preferred to landfilling
- Benefits of composting leaves
- Things to be aware of when composting leaves
- Tips for getting started composting leaves in the backyard
- Tips for getting started composting leaves at municipal solid waste facilities




Divert organic material from landfills
Reduction in methane gas production at landfills
Reduction in heat-trapping greenhouses gases
Improved health of humans and the environment



Let's all do our part to help reduce methane production at landfills



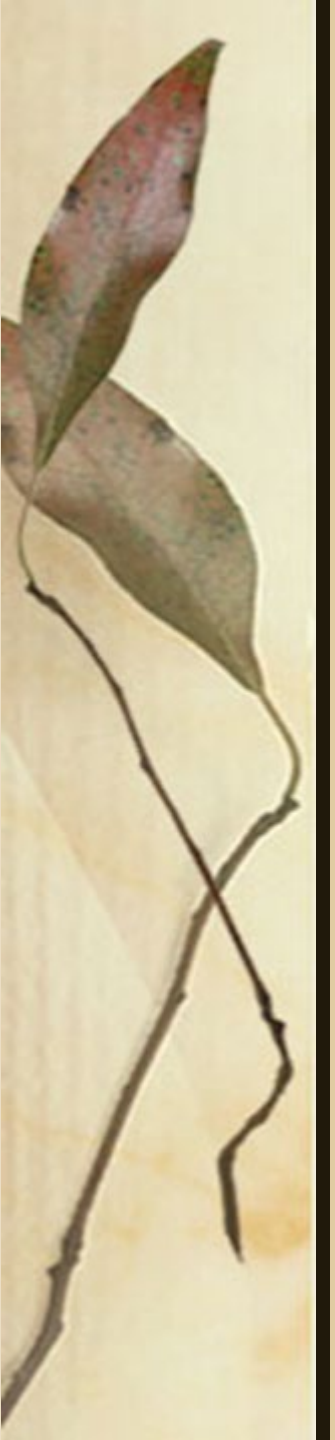
Better purpose than landfilling

- Semi-arid climate marked by extended periods of drought
  - Water retention capacity of soils increases significantly with addition of composted organic matter

New Mexico soils need compost and organic matter!

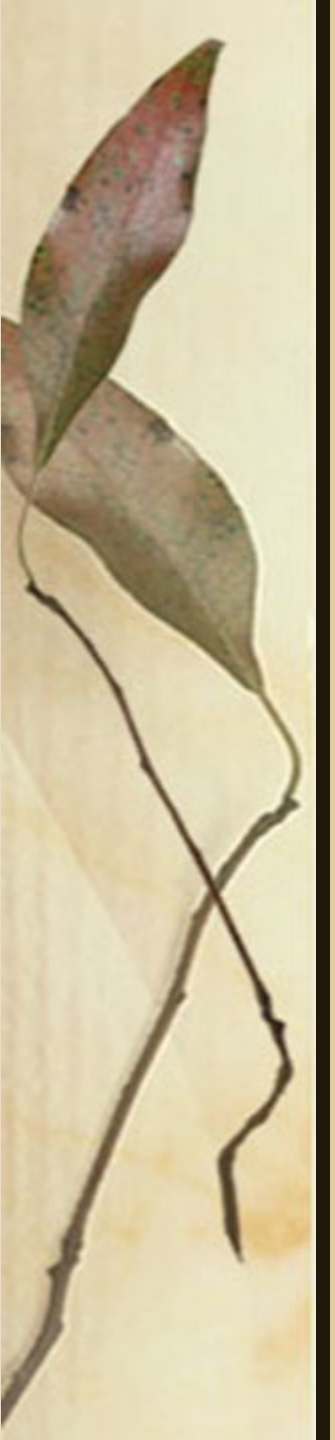
Benefits of composting with leaves

- Easy way to get started with composting as leaves are a relatively easy material to manage
- Abundant compost feedstock – especially in urban areas
- Fairly predictable time frame for collection of this material from October to January



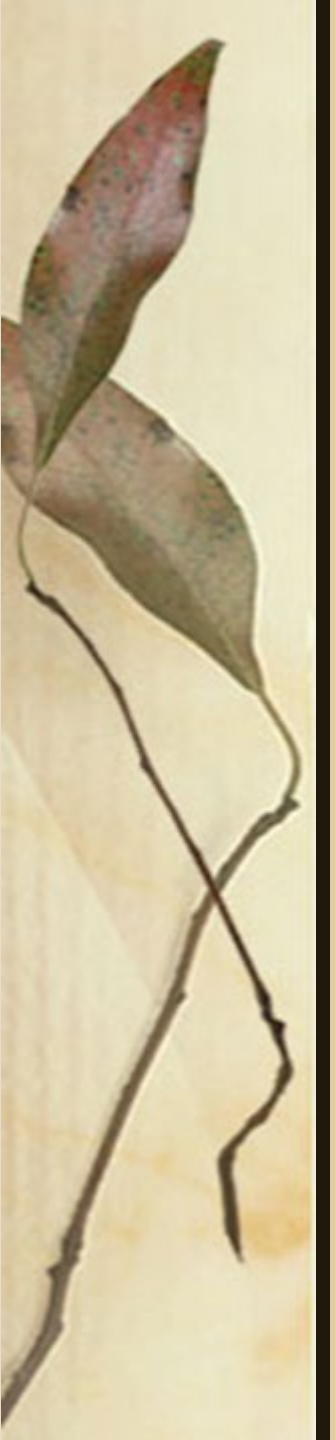
Benefits of composting with leaves

- Easy collection - generally already bagged
- Easy material to compost on its own or mixed with other organic matter
- Easy to scale up composting of this material, from backyard to municipal scale
- Good C:N ratio
  - Generally range between 40:1 and 80:1
- Nature's nutrient recyclers



Benefits of composting with leaves

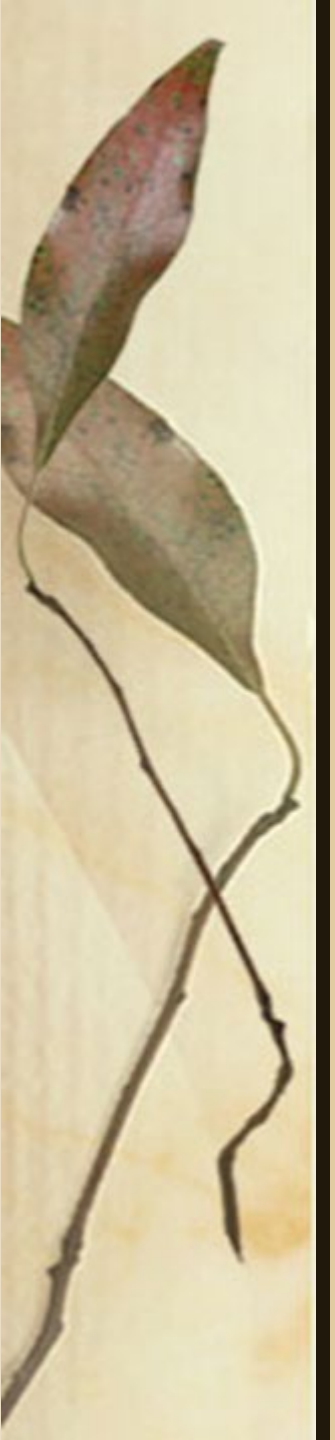
- Produce a valuable product for your community, local soils
- Can become seasonal activity, similar to collection and mulching of Christmas trees



Things to be aware of:

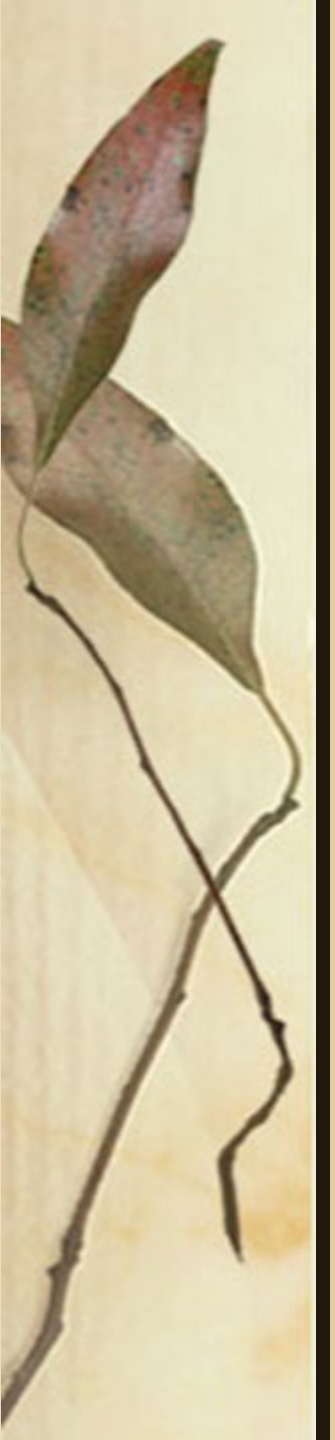
- Contamination is minimal, but not non-existent
  - candy wrappers, cigarette butts, toys, etc.

- Moisture levels of leaves
  - Too dry = Leaves can repel water, slowing rate of decomposition (solution = shred leaves, add water and/or cover piles to retain moisture)
  - Too wet = Leaves can create a mat, composting process can go anaerobic (not what you want)



Things to be aware of:

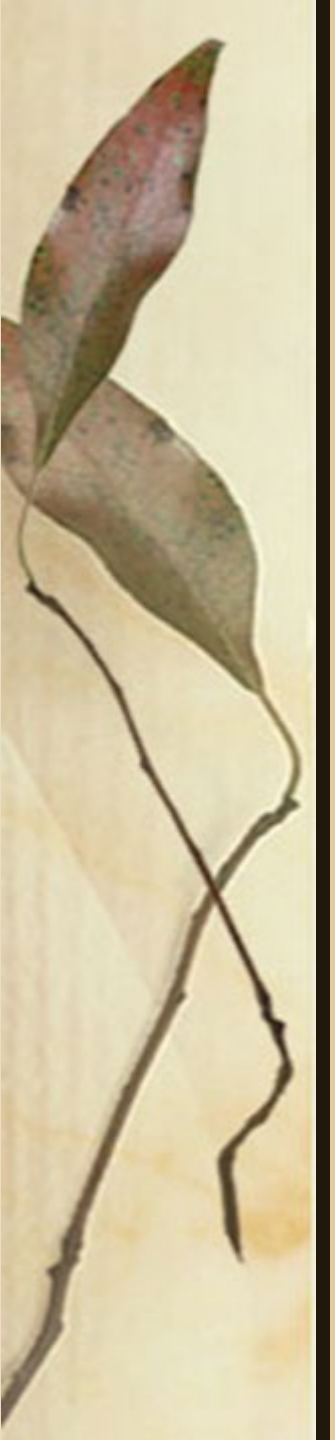
- Pesticide/herbicide/fungicide residue of minimal concern, BUT avoid if possible
- Avoid composting diseased leaves
- Best to have a mix of different types of leaves



Tips for Backyard Composting

- Collect leaves from your own yard and/or neighborhood (ask around, use social media sites)
- Add to existing compost set-up or start new one with the leaves. Layer between food scraps.
- Sheet mulch leaves on garden beds directly and allow it to over-winter

Shredding Options

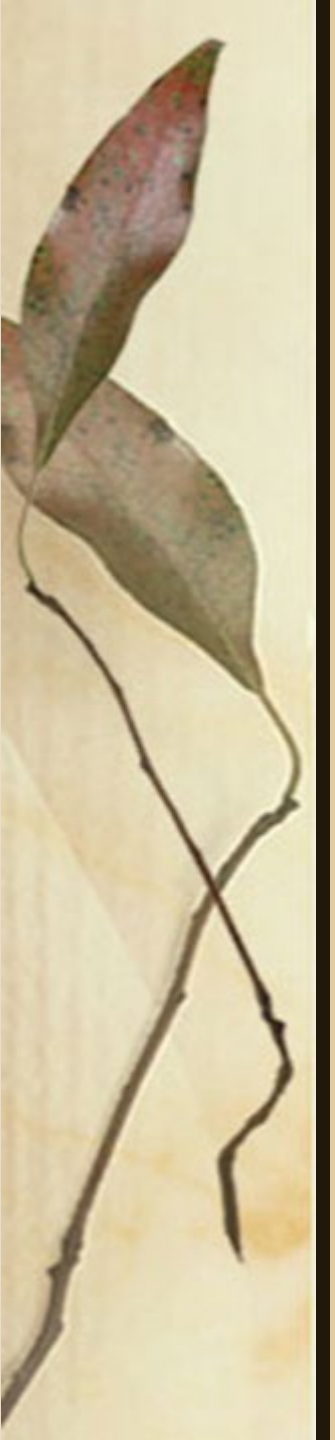


Tips for municipal composters

- Have a plan (including how to deal with contamination)
- Contact Permit Section of SWB to update your Operations Plan
- Get the word out
  - Connect with haulers/landscaping companies, parks departments, local residents
- Consider reduced or free tipping for this material to encourage drop off and diversion

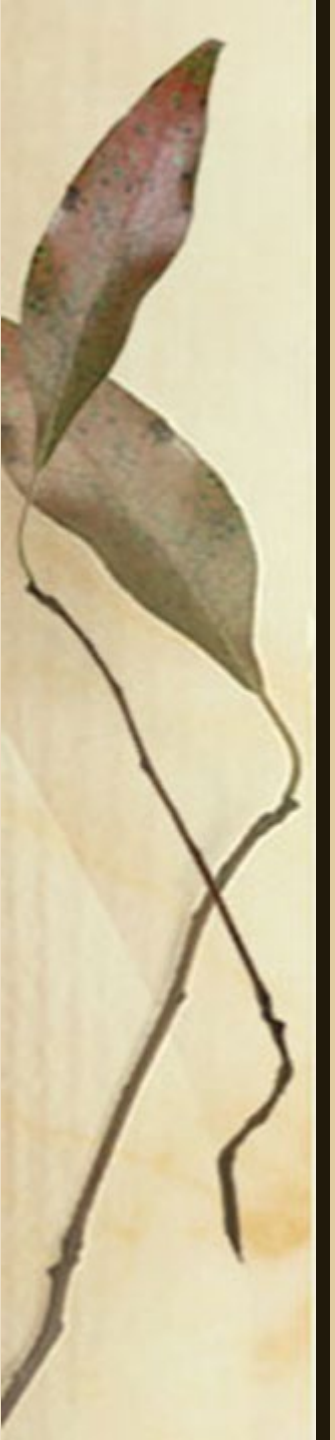
Tips for large-scale composters

- Municipal or private compost facilities
  - Municipal:
    - Incorporate into existing biosolids and/or yard scraps composting
    - Leaf-only composting okay, but better when co-composted with a high nitrogen material (biosolids, manure, food scraps)
    - To shred or not to shred?



Tips for large-scale composters

- De-bag and handle material promptly, mixing in leaves of different moisture levels
- Keep it “fluffy”- mix/aerate piles to avoid matting and anaerobic conditions
- Use leaves as a “scab” to retain moisture or bio-filter to reduce odors in static piles or windrows



Let's talk composting!

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