**Weekly Express-News Article**

**By Calvin R. Finch, PhD, SAWS Director, and Horticulturist**

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**Sticky Situation Under Pecan Trees**

If you have pecan trees in your landscape, chances are that you also have a sticky coating on everything in the vicinity. The material is called “honeydew.” It is the excrement of yellow aphids who make their living from sucking the juices from pecan leaves and other plants.

This year the combination of weather and pecan foliage conditions, the aphids are especially prevalent.

Because of the height of pecan trees and the sensitivities of neighbors in an urban setting it is not practical to spray the pests. Manufactured insecticides will kill aphids but they may do more damage to beneficial insect populations than the aphids. A soap solution may be the best option if your tree is small or you have access to a powerful sprayer.

If you spray the “honeydew” from your car and sidewalk just after it falls, it will rinse off but within a short period the material dries and is harder to remove. The car wash or a soapy solution may be necessary.

Expect the aphid population to decline as the weather cools. In the worst case, they of course, will disappear when the leaves fall!

Speaking of the leaves falling, it won’t be long before the leaves will be on your lawn. It has sneaked up on us but it is nearly December.

Plant to take advantage of the leaves that fall in your yard, they are a valuable resource. Leaves are organic material and as such can contribute to the improvement of your soil and contribute nutrients to your lawn.

The easiest way to utilize leaves is to mow them where they fall on the lawn. The chopped leaves decompose very quickly. Even leaves that are not mowed decompose quickly.

Leaves are also useful as mulch. Spread them two to six inches deep in the shrub border or over newly planted tree roots to save water and keep the soil cool.

Some gardeners incorporate leaves into their vegetable or flower gardens each year. This action duplicates the action of farmers that disc crop residues into the fields where they were grown to contribute to soil texture and provide new material for beneficial micro organisms. Like the farmers, include some extra fertilizer to speed up the decomposition and eliminate any temporary nitrogen deficit.

Leaves also make good material for compost pile. Count them as brown material that will break down quickly if matched with an equal amount of green material such as weeds, or remnants from your summer flower garden.

If there is absolutely no way you can utilize the leaves make them available for other gardeners. Bagged clean leaves will usually be picked up by someone in the neighborhood if it is known that they are available.

Leaves are just too valuable to end up in the landfill. It is a double negative. The organic material should not be wasted and the landfill space should not be filled with something that can be recycled so easily.

All leaves are valuable. The idea that pecan leaves contain too much tannin or that oak leaves are too acid is not a legitimate concern. The chemical potency of leaves is not comparable to the potency of our soil. To maintain any level of organic material in our soil requires that we replenish it every year.

The key is that leaves are organic material. Organic material is important to soil productivity. In our climate it does not accumulate but decomposes as time passes. Our combination of soil and climate makes it one big compost pile.