

# TALKING SHOP



THIS OLD HOUSE

October 2001

## Leaves Off Grass

Once shredded, leaves can serve as fine mulch for trees and planting beds. Powered by a 6-horsepower gas engine, the LeafCycler functions both as a blower and as a vacuum with a rotating blade that reduces leaves' volume 8 to 1; a chipper tube accepts tree and bush trimmings up to 2½ inches in diameter.



**A**s fall's brilliant canopy fades to brown, a thickening layer of leaves blankets the yard, signaling that there's work to be done. "Leaf cleanup can be a forbidding task," says *This Old House* landscaping contractor Roger Cook. "But if you don't do it, you may smother your lawn."

Clearing leaves is easier when approached methodically. The first goal is to get all the leaves in the open, where they can be swept or blown onto a large tarp and dragged to a single location, be it truck bed or **BY CLAYTON DEKORNE** compost container (see "Building a Leaf Composting Bin," page 58), or bagged for curbside pickup. "It's not necessary to gather every last leaf," says Roger; if a few remain, they'll break down, and enrich the soil. "Just concentrate on gathering the masses that will keep needed air from getting to your lawn," he says.

He begins by clearing the leaves around the perimeter of the yard, and those tangled under shrubs and in beds. A combination of large and small rakes works well for this task. A blower is faster—albeit louder. "Manufacturers are trying

to address the noise problem," says Roger, who dons ear and eye protection when using a blower. "And there really is no more efficient tool for the job."

He advises against raking over long distances or using small vacuums, whose bags must be emptied often.

"The trick is to spend the least amount of energy moving the leaves around."

To collect leaves for disposal, Roger typically sucks them up with a large, 16-horsepower vacuum that also grinds them; then he dumps the shreds into a truck. Homeowners can buy or rent a smaller wheeled vacuum to do the same—or find an out-of-the-way place to pile the gathered leaves and prepare compost for next spring's buds.