

TURNING BACKYARD DEBRIS INTO GARDENIG GOLD
by Peter Tonge (9/15/87)

When I first invested in a top-of-the-line power shredder (not to be confused with the Leaf Eater) years ago, the only way I could justify the purchase was to equate it with a set of golf clubs. If I didn't garden so intensively, I'd probably be out on the golf course, or so I reasoned. But I quickly discovered that a shredder's purchase can be readily justified by the value of the product it turns out - garden mulch and compost.

The beauty of a shredder is its ability to take often unsightly, difficult-to-handle wastes and convert them instantly into an attractive soil amendment that would be costly if bought at a garden center. By valuing the volume of shredded wastes used in my garden on a par with store-bought peat moss, my shredder paid for itself in the first year of operation.

Garden wastes and leaves are obvious fall candidates for the shredder, but shredding opportunities abound year round. For instance, I often make pleasingly aromatic mulch on the first sunny day after Christmas - from neighbors' discarded Christmas trees. The mulch is immediately spread under evergreens and other perennials to provide additional root protection in the colder weeks that follow.

Rotting cedar shingles from an old garden shed were among the more unusual materials to pass through my shredder, along with squares left over from a ceiling repair job. The cedar shingles made a particularly attractive mulch that looked somewhat like ornamental bark. A bonanza of calcium-rich shells from a clam-digger neighbor of mine is yet another shreddable material that comes to mind.

While gardeners have long been sold on the merits of shredding, non-gardening homeowners are beginning to value the machines as well. In regions where landfills are rapidly running out, surcharges are increasingly being made on bagged garden refuse. Six to eight bags of leaves can be concentrated in one bag after shredding; this cuts these waste-removal costs dramatically.

The best way to go is to spread the waste around the yard - 1 or 2 inches thick under trees, around foundation plantings, on the perennial bed, or even as a thin (one-eighth inch) top dressing on a lawn. Once you see the beneficial results of using yard waste this way, you will seldom feel you have enough to go around. - P.T.

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