**Template Op-Ed for Leave the Leaves**Provided by Bee City USA, an initiative of the Xerces Society

**Leave the Leaves to Help Pollinators**

It’s fall, the time of year when we enjoy the glorious colors and leaf blowers are revving up. But do we really need to remove every leaf from our gardens? From the pollinator perspective, the answer is “no.” A neat and tidy garden is what it looks like—barren and devoid of shelter for bumble bees, mason bees, and so many other pollinators.

This fall, [AFFILIATE NAME] is encouraging residents to “leave the leaves”, a seasonal effort to provide habitat for beneficial insects, pollinators, and other invertebrates. As a Bee City USA affiliate, volunteers have been working to protect pollinators and spread the word across [AFFILIATE NAME]. [*Provide local examples*].

Leaves and other decaying vegetation are an important part of the habitat that supports a diversity of wildlife. Overwintering bumble bee queens seek out leaf litter or soft soil to burrow into. Red-banded hairstreak butterflies lay their eggs on fallen oak leaves, which become the first food of the caterpillars. Woolly bears tuck themselves into leaf piles for winter protection before emerging as Isabella tiger moths as adults in spring. Not to mention the fireflies, rove beetles, millipedes, and so many other mini-beasts that live in or hunt through decaying vegetation—and of course, the robins, towhees, and sparrows that glean food on the ground.

Protecting these creatures is as easy as doing less yard work in the fall, and leaving a layer of leaves an inch or two thick. This protects beneficial insects from predators and insulates them from the elements. But keeping leaves in your yard doesn’t have to be messy – you can rake leaves into piles and arrange them around trees or into garden beds. But be sure not to shred the leaves, as this could kill any insect eggs or larvae present. Beyond leaving the leaves, many insects use hollow stems as nesting sites, so keep these stalks until spring to provide habitat. In particular, “cavity nesting” bees, like mason bees, utilize these hollow stems!

Providing overwintering habitat is important, since many insect species across North America are experiencing declines, and some are at risk of extinction. Residential areas can provide essential habitat for our invertebrates. As a Bee City, we are joining other Bee City affiliates across the country in this initiative.

Leaving the leaves is just one way to help beneficial insects! These species will benefit even more from intentional habitat plantings in your yard, so contact the [AFFILIATE] Bee City representatives [WEBSITE or CONTACT] for information on the best local native plants for bees and natural enemies, and where to find them.

Along with providing habitat, eliminating pesticide use is another essential step to protect pollinators in your yard. Many beneficial insects are very sensitive to the lethal effects of insecticides, while herbicides eliminate the flowers they use for food and habitat. Home gardens can thrive without pesticides – only two percent of insects are considered pests! The vast majority provide important benefits like pollination, pest control, and providing food for other animals.

So, in addition to leaving the leaves this fall, consider forgoing pesticides and embracing the wildlife in your yard. The Xerces Society has resources on their website, including winter habitat creation and pollinator-friendly pest and weed control measures.

**Further Reading**

<https://xerces.org/leave-the-leaves>

<https://xerces.org/pollinator-conservation/yards-and-gardens>

**Ideas for where to share this op-ed**

* Community newspapers
* Regional newspapers
* Neighborhood newsletters
* Homeowner’s association (HOA) newsletters