

# MiSustainable Holland

## About this series

The MiSustainable Holland column is a collection of community voices sharing updates about local sustainability initiatives.

## This Week's Sustainability Framework Theme:

**Community Knowledge:** The collective knowledge and energy of the community is an incredible resource that must be channeled to where it is needed.

## Composting process turns Holland's leaves into soil

By Marianne Manderfield  
City of Holland

Each fall, we watch the beautiful transformation of leaves changing colors. Holland's tree canopy will go from deep green to golden yellows, brilliant oranges, and fiery reds. Over a few weeks, all those leaves eventually fall to the ground, and that vibrant tree canopy will be bare.

As city residents, we rake the fallen leaves from our yards to the curb and don't look back. With the streets filled with leaves, some may wonder if it's practice for maneuvering our vehicles around the coming piles of snow. It's not; it's time to welcome Holland's Annual Fall Leaf Pick-up and the first step in turning those leaves into soil.

The City of Holland gives residents a specific time period to have their leaves raked to the curb or shoulder of the road. After that specified date, street crews pick up the leaf piles, and the streets of Holland will once again be clear.

But where do all the leaves go? What does the city do with all these leaves? And why is it that "only leaves will be picked up" and not tree branches, piles of sticks, or dead shrubs?

That's because picking up "only leaves" is the beginning of a composting process. These leaves are turned into rich soil that is used throughout the city.

Leaf composting is one of many ways Holland practices sustainability. The city has been conducting the Annual Fall Leaf Pick-Up for about 40 years. Over time, the composting process has evolved with technological advances, equipment, and staff knowledge.

Street crews bring most leaves to a Holland Board of Public Works property. Turning leaves into soil is about an 18-month to two-year process. Teams from the Streets Department use a front-end loader to turn the compost piles every six to eight weeks. Other organic matter is added to the leaves, such as pumpkins and old plant debris from changing the beddings between tulips and annuals.

When the mounds of leaves have turned into an acceptable soil level, the material undergoes a screening process to remove any sticks, woody debris, and garbage.

The Parks and Streets departments work together in sharing the compost. The resulting soil is used for tulip and annual plantings, cemetery burials, and parkway restoration on street reconstruction projects. Composting the leaves means the City of Holland has not needed to purchase soil in the past several years.

Next time you rake leaves to the curb, pause and remind yourself you are an integral part of MiSustainable Holland.

■ *Marianne Manderfield is public information coordinator for the City of Holland.*