

Village of Oak Park 2024 Fall Leaf Collection Program

Transition Information and FAQs

Introduction

Beginning this Fall, The Village of Oak Park is modernizing its Fall Leaf Collection Program to improve safety, help the environment and provide residents with more choices for how to handle leaves.

The modernization of the Fall Leaf Collection Program - the first since 1994 - will address resident concern over the potential safety hazards that leaf piles caused, streamline the leaf collection pickup process, and reduce confusion over parking restrictions. The Village conducted case studies of 150 Illinois municipalities to identify best practices for leaf collection.

The Village will broadly communicate details via its website, social media channels, E-newsletter, OP/FYI, local media outlets, Oak Park Township newsletter and more. Staff will also be tabling at community events throughout the coming months to educate residents and answer questions in-person.

- **What is changing about the Fall Leaf Collection Program?**

Oak Park's annual Fall Leaf Collection period typically runs from late October - early December. In 2022, the Village entered a 5-year contract with its current residential waste hauler Lakeshore Recycling Systems (LRS). The Village utilized a pile program model through 2023, in which large piles of loose leaves were consolidated at street corners for collection.

This year, residents will no longer sweep leaves to the curb. Instead, residents are able to choose from a variety of leaf collection options that will improve safety, sustainability, and efficiency .

- **What are my choices?**

Instead of raking leaves to the street, residents can participate by choosing a method the Fall Leaf Collection Program, including:

- **Bag fallen leaves.** Fallen leaves can be bagged in yard waste bags and/or rigid containers with a weight less than 50 pounds when filled. The bags and/or containers shall be placed in the parkway as close to the curb as possible.

Green yard-waste stickers **are not required** during the 6-week Fall Leaf Collection Program and residents may put out an unlimited number of bags and/or rigid containers in the parkway on their designated collection day. Note that leaves collected by landscapers for residential refuse customers during the Fall Leaf Collection Program may be bagged and placed in the parkway for pickup. If the landscaper does not want to bag the leaves, they are responsible for removal and disposal.

- **Compost them.** Sign up for the Village's **CompostAble Program**. Composting saves water, reduces waste and combats climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Participants receive a large 96-gallon bin for weekly collection of yard waste and food scraps. Fall leaves can go directly into the compost bin for removal on regular service days. No bags are required, and other organics will also be diverted from the landfill. Visit this link to learn more about the program and sign up for a bin: [CompostAble Program](#)

- **Leave the leaves.** Leaving the leaves on your lawn is a great opportunity to support regional biodiversity, protect and provide food for birds, save money on fertilizers, and allow leaf litter to decompose naturally in your yard or garden this winter to feed your soil. This aligns with the Village's recently announced pledge drive during International Compost Awareness Week. Visit this link to learn more about the initiative and sign the pledge: [Leave the Leaves Pledge](#)

- **How will the bags and containers be picked up?**

The Village's residential waste hauler, Lakeshore Recycling Systems (LRS), will have dedicated compost trucks and leaf crews that will collect bags and empty rigid landscape containers from the parkway according to the route and schedule set by Public Works staff. A Village-wide make-up day is included in the weekly Fall Leaf Collection schedule to supplement areas with higher leaf volumes or to catch-up after inclement weather events.

- **Why is this change occurring?**

The Village last updated its Fall Leaf Collection Program in 1994. This modernization will result in increased choice for residents, environmental benefits for the community, enhanced safety in line with the Village's Vision Zero

commitment to eliminate death and injury from traffic crashes by making streets safer for all, and potential reduction in costs for collection.

- **What are some of the benefits from this transition?**

The modernization of the Fall Leaf Collection Program more directly aligns with stated Village Board Goals related to programs and initiatives such as: Community Health & Safety; Vibrant, Diverse, Connected Neighborhoods; Sustainability & Resiliency; Climate Ready Oak Park (CROP) and Vision Zero.

These benefits may include, but are not limited, to:

- Enhancing safety by reducing incidents of children playing in large leaf piles in dangerous proximity to busy traffic and intersections
- Reduced greenhouse gas emissions from fewer truck pickups and improved routing of trucks
- Eliminating large leaf piles at corners that block crosswalk and sidewalk access and cause impaired visibility for pedestrians, motorists, and cyclists
- Mitigating the threat of residential vehicle and waste hauler truck fires from parking near or on top of leaf piles and/or being in close proximity to hot engines during collection
- Environmental benefits from mulching, such as increased tree and soil health, and providing food to grow bird populations
- Resolving inconvenient changes in parking restrictions due to overnight leaf-pushing and daytime collection of piles, causing confusion and disproportionate reduction of parking in areas
- Reducing overall costs by preventing multi-family (5+ units) and commercial buildings, institutions, and landscapers from taking advantage of the historic pile model by increasing the total volume of leaves collected and the associated disposal fees

- **What is the cost to collect my leaves?**

The Village has determined, based on historic leaf collection averages, that a typical Village household would require one (1) to (3) three yard-waste bags per week and purchase a total of five (5) to 16 bags for the year. At \$0.50 per bag, this amounts to approximately \$2.50 to \$8 in costs per household/annually.

The Village is exploring rebate and/or giveaway options, as well. More information will be available shortly.

Residents interested in participating in the Village's [CompostAble Program](#) can subscribe for \$16.31/mo and will receive a 96-gallon gray cart for the weekly collection of organics, a kitchen compost pail and a sample of compostable bags for food scraps. Residents who join CompostAble for the first time will get three months free if they sign up for 12 months of continuous service.

- **What will happen if I put piles of leaves in the street?**

All Village staff will be trained and knowledgeable of the Fall Leaf Collection program guidelines and be equipped with educational materials and supplies to encourage compliance on the spot. It is possible that a citation may be issued if a leaf pile remains after multiple engagements with Village staff. A Fall Leaf Collection Program reporting platform will be developed for residents to notify the Village of leaf piles and for staff to track the status of violations.

- **What if I live in a large, multi-family building?**

The Fall Leaf Collection Program is intended to service single-family (buildings with 5 or fewer dwelling units) residents in Oak Park. Other types of buildings such as multi-family (5+units), commercial, or institutional are responsible for their own leaf removal and disposal. The Village will not remove leaf piles in the street or collect landscape bags from these types of property owners.

- **I need help shoveling and/or collecting leaves. Who can help me?**

The Village currently has a Sidewalk Shoveling Program to assist residents that physically cannot shovel snow nor afford to hire a shoveling service. The shoveling contractor has agreed to expand the program to provide leaf services, as well.

The Village also plans to develop a Community Volunteer Portal that will connect local volunteers with those in need, for both leaf and snow removal. Additional details are to come.

- **How is this different from the previous system?**

Fall Leaf Collection has been a complex process requiring coordination from residents, the Village, and our contracted residential waste hauler to ensure safety and success. The pile collection method operated as follows:

- Resident's Role – Rake or blow the fallen leaves from the property out to the curb the day before your block's scheduled collection.
- The Village's Role – Village employees work overnight using special heavy equipment to push the leaves put out by residents into large piles at street corners for collection the next day.
- The Waste Hauler's Role – Designated leaf crews use special heavy equipment and block off streets to collect the large corner piles according to the schedule set by the Village.

Prior to 1994, the Fall Leaf Program was performed entirely by the Public Works Department. Since 1994, the Fall Leaf Collection Program has been provided as a 6-8-week joint operation (late October – early December) between the Public Works Department and the waste hauler hired by the Village for residential refuse, recycling and compost services. In 2022, the Village entered a five-year contract with its current residential waste hauler Lakeshore Recycling Systems (LRS). The Village has utilized a pile program model through 2023. Residents would rake leaves into the street. LRS would deploy trucks on a scheduled basis to push large piles of loose leaves for consolidation at street corners for collection, and haul the leaves to the LRS transfer station in Maywood, IL and to the Whole Earth Compost facility for processing. Single-family residents (buildings with 5 or fewer dwelling units) would pay a fee for Fall Leaf Collection services that was included in their quarterly refuse rate. The 2024 Fall Leaf Collection fee was \$2.42/month per household.

- **How did the Village arrive at the decision to change the Fall Leaf Collection Program?**

The Village last revisited its leaf collection process in 1994. The modernization of the Village's Fall Leaf Collection Program has been in discussion since fall 2023.

Trustees expressed growing concerns regarding the safety and efficiency of the Village's Fall Leaf Collection Program. Public Works staff was directed to evaluate the current program model for improvements and present alternatives to the Board. Village staff performed case studies of 150 Illinois municipalities and found that only 10 other communities utilize the historic pile program model.

Please visit the links below to view recordings from the Board meetings with agenda items pertaining to the Fall Leaf Collection Program:

- [November 20, 2023](#)
- [March 12, 2024](#)
- [April 30, 2024](#)

Staff is performing ongoing engagement with community partners and organizations, citizen advisory groups, local businesses, contractors, residents, landscapers, and multiple Village departments to ensure an equitable, effective, and transparent transition for all involved.

CONTACT

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