



ask

Celebrating 20 Years!
the landscape professional

Linda K. Lillie of Sprigs & Twigs

Welcome to my weekly series!

Email or mail your questions to: info@sprigsandtwigs.net or
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Thank you Readers for Voting Sprigs & Twigs
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Question this Week: *My neighbor and I have a bet. He says fallen oak leaves make soil more acidic and I say that's not true. Can you settle this?... Dennis, Essex*

Linda's Answer:

Actually, you are both right in a way. Acidity is measured by a term called pH which is represented by a number scale from 0 to 14. A pH of 7 is neutral; pH below 7 is acidic and pH above 7 is basic (or alkaline). Back a hundred years ago, a Danish chemist first developed the concept of pH (which means 'power of hydrogen'). Since then, it has been universally used in most fields of science.



When oak leaves first fall off the trees, they have an acidic pH in the range of 4.5 to 5.5 depending on the type of oak tree they came from. If you were to mix them into the soil immediately, they would temporarily slightly acidify the surface layer of the soil, but as they quickly decompose, the soil would become more alkaline. The net effect is that the oak leaves would not acidify the soil in the long run. Leaves are actually a good thing to work into your soil. As they decompose, they become food for the microorganisms that are essential for a healthy soil eco-system. They also help with minimizing soil compaction and keeping the soil structure loose. It is good practice to remove thick layers of leaves from your lawn to keep them from matting down and inhibiting the grass growth in the spring. Running your mower over the remaining leaves is really helpful to raise the organic matter content of the soil. I know some folks like to remove the leaves from their woodlands because they like the appearance, but keep in mind you are depriving the trees of their natural fertilizer.

Linda K. Lillie has been President of Sprigs & Twigs, Inc. for the last 20 years. She is a graduate of Connecticut College in Botany, an accredited NOFA Organic Land Care Professional, a Connecticut Master Gardener and a national award winning landscape designer for her design and installation projects.

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