Leaves

Where do fall colors come from? It may seem like magic, but there is another explanation for beautiful fall colors. Those bright colors were already in the leaves, masked by larger amounts of green. As days shorten and temperatures cool, a narrow ring of tissue forms at the base of every broad leaf, corking the flow of liquid nutrients both ways. As the remaining chlorophyll (green pigment) breaks down, the green fades, and we see the vivid yellows, oranges, and reds that were there all along.

For art projects you can do with leaves, visit www.massaudubon.org/go.

ready, set, Go Outside!

Parent/Teacher Note

Skills Learned: Conservation, observation, comparison (of colors, shapes, and details), math (counting and sorting), understanding of the forest nutrient cycle, creative outdoor play, leaf identification, and art (online activity).

Falling Leaves

- **Leaf Rainbows**—Collect multicolored leaves. How many colors can you see in each one?
- **Leaf Pile**—Rake up a big pile of leaves and jump in it! Be a good nature steward and put the raked leaves in the woods or shredded up in your garden when you are finished. This will help give nutrients back to the soil, and it may provide valuable winter shelter for small animals and plants.
- **Leaf Games**—Make up your own games with leaves. You can have races, matching games, or a contest for finding the leaf that is the largest, the most colorful, or the most uniquely shaped.

Looking at Leaves

- **Make a leaf collection**—Collect the most colorful and varied leaves you can find. Give them names you make up. Later, grab a field guide or go online to look up their real names.
- **Forest floor archaeology**—In a wooded area, move some newly fallen leaves aside. Can you see older leaves that have partially decomposed? These older leaves likely fell 1 to 2 years ago. Keep digging. Next you will find fragments of leaves that fell 3 to 5 years ago. Dig deeper and you will eventually find humus, the rich soil layer that forms from leaves that fell 7 plus years ago. What will you find next if you keep digging below the humus? Try it and find out.

Eco-Kids: Show us your stuff!

Tell us what you did with fall leaves and we may include it on our website. Please send your name, age, grade, phone number, and city or town. We will notify you if your submission is selected. Submissions will become the property of Mass Audubon and will not be returned.

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