

HAH ROUNDTABLE JANUARY 7, 2017

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SHREDDING YOUR LEAVES TO USE AS MULCH

At the December Roundtable one of the topics was "handy tools." Peter and I had purchased the **Sun Joe SDJ616 Shredder Joe 13-Amp 16:1 Reduction Electric Leaf Mulcher/Shredder**. Since there was a great deal of interest in the subjects of soil amendments and using leaf mulch, Peter brought the electric shredder to this Roundtable session, along with a plastic bag filled with the finished product. Although, for the sake of keeping our library tidy, we did not plug it in and load in leaves, I believe Peter did a good job of describing the process.

We had decided to stop purchasing wood chips and mulch as, after the weight of snow and ice during caused them to compact during the winter, come spring the mulch would be so hard that perennials would struggle to grow through them. Purchasing bags of wood mulch had also become expensive. So we experimented with shredding our own leaves using our lawn mower with bag and mulcher attachments. After all the leaves had fallen and as each garden area was raked free of leaves and debris, we reintroduced the shredded leaves to the beds. The average pile of leaves is reduced by 90% once finely shredded. When applied to the beds the material is fluffy, so after it rains the layer appears to be reduced even further. This fine leaf mulch provides a nice appearance to the beds, it doesn't harbor rodents, and it decomposes much faster than wood chips, thus amending the soil more quickly.

Last year we decided to stop using the mower and to purchase the electric shredder because shredding the leaves, along with occasional acorns and twigs that accompany them, was causing wear and tear on the mower blades and other components. The best part is that, once you've amortized the cost of the shredder, the mulch is free. The electric, rather than gas, shredder is less noisy and less polluting to you and your neighbors. Instead of a plastic bag, Peter places a small, canvas bin (one of those collapsing types) under the shredder to catch the shredded leaves. If the leaves are not shredded as finely as we would like, he'll run them through a second time.

One member wrote in that he does not use winter mulch at all, as it interferes with the soil temperature. We have not found this to be a problem. Nor do we always wait for the soil to freeze, as many recommend, and that has not been a problem for us either. Sometimes the leaves are a bit matted by spring, but that hasn't prevented any spring growth coming through. George Biercuk pointed out that different kinds of leaves decompose at different rates; for instance, oak leaves take longer than maple leaves. George also adds fertilizer to his leaf mulch. One can also add lime if the soil becomes too acidic.

Moving on from leaf shredders, the topic of wood chippers was discussed. Several attendees had not heard good things about *Troy-Bilt* chippers in that they are too large to store and perhaps too powerful for the average gardener, but did not know of anything better. It was suggested that chipped wood makes a good foundation for a garden path. So if anyone has had a good experience with a particular type or brand, please let us know!

SILVER AND GRAY FOLIAGE PLANTS

The history of designing gardens with silver/gray foliage plants is an interesting one. According to one of the several books in our HAH library that mentions this subject, *Elegant Silvers* by Gardner and Bussolini, Gertrude Jekyll designed one-color gardens in the Victorian era using whites to highlight silvers. Vita Sackville-West introduced her 'white garden' at Sissinghurst Castle in 1949-1950 and launched the "silver cult," using silvers to highlight the whites. In 1930's America, as part of a Colonial Revival movement, herb gardens became popular and many were designed with silver foliage plants in the herb family. Rock gardens include many silver/gray perennials and shrubs, as do warm-weather and seasonal container gardens, as many plants in this category are not hardy on the east end.

All (except one!) of the silver/gray foliage plants listed here are deer resistant. This is the best news of all, and one great reason to include them in your garden. Many are also fragrant, being in the herb family. Except where indicated, all stand up to heat and drought, and need sun, good drainage, and neutral to alkaline soil. Use them in one-color gardens or as excellent color-contrast plants with whites, dark blue/purples, yellows, oranges, pinks/reds. There is also a wide selection of tender perennials and annuals from which to choose, but space prohibits my listing them.

Herbaceous Perennials

Achillea (yarrow) 'Moonshine'
 Artemisia absinthian (wormwood) 'Silver Mound,' 'Powis Castle,' 'Silver King'
 Athyrium niponicum 'Pictum' (Japanese painted fern) **shade and moist soil**
 Begonia 'Pewterware'
 Brunnera macrophylla 'Jack Frost' (Siberian bugloss) groundcover, 18", **shade, moist soil**
 Carex morrowii (sedge) 'Silver Sceptre'
 Cerastium tomentosum (snow-in summer) groundcover, self-seeds,
 Chasmanthium (sea oats) 'River Mist'
 Dianthus (pinks) 'Fire Witch' and 'Pomegranate Kiss'
 Echinops ritro and humilis (globe thistle)
 Eryngium planum (sea holly)
 Helictotrichon sempervirens (blue oat grass)
 Heuchera (coral bells) 'Pewter Veil' and 'Pewter Moon' - **not deer resistant**
 Lamium maculatum (deadnettle), 'Purple Dragon' and 'White Nancy,' groundcover, self-seeds
 Leontopodium alpinum (edelweiss)
 Liriope 'Silver Dragon'
 Lychnis coronarius (rose campion)
 Nepeta (catmint)
 Panicum vergatum (switchgrass) 'Heavy Metal' features metallic-blue foliage and columnar form
 Pulmonaria (lungwort) 'Silver Shimmers' and 'Excalibur' **shade and moist soil**
 Salvia argentea (silver sage), biennial
 Thymus 'Argenteus' (lemon-scented green leaves edged in silver and lilac flowers in early summer)
 Stachys byzantina (lamb's ears)
 Verbascum bombyciferum (giant silver mullein) 5-feet tall
 Veronica spicata (wooly Speedwell)

Woody sub-shrubs (cut back to 8-12" in early spring to promote bloom and prevent legginess)

Buddleia (butterfly bush)	Salvia officinalis (culinary sage)
Caryopteris x clandonensis (bluebeard)	Santolina (cotton lavender)
Lavandula (lavender)	Teucrium (germander)
Perovskia atriplicifolia (Russian sage)	

Shrubs

Salix alba	Salix exigua
Salix helvetica (Swiss willow)	Salix lenata (wooly willow)
Vitex agnus-castus (chaste tree)	

Trees

Populus alba (silver poplar) leaves are green on topside and silver on the underside **-one attendee pointed out that this variety is fast to grow and fast to die.**
 Shad - this tree was mentioned as having silver/gray foliage, but that it drops its leaves very early
 Tilia petiolaris (weeping silver linden)
 Tilia tomentosa (silver linden) leaves are also silver on underside)

OTHER BOOKS FROM THE HAH LIBRARY: *Architectural Foliage* by Jill Billington, *Foliage* by Nancy Ondra, and *Foliage* by David Joyce; I also found several great articles in our "Vertical Files" near the computer.

**THE NEXT HAH
 ROUNDTABLE WILL
 TAKE PLACE ON
 SATURDAY, FEBRUARY
 4TH, AT 10AM TO NOON.
 TOPICS WILL INCLUDE:**

- **HOW TO MAKE
AND USE YOUR
OWN COMPOST**