



PAULINE PEARS

"Sifted leafmould  
... spread on lawns  
is as good a  
dressing now as  
it was when Drake  
played bowls on  
a leafmould-fed  
green".

Lawrence D Hills

# Still muck & magic

**Give up smoking bonfires,  
make compost and leafmould instead**

**L**awrence D. Hills (founder of HDRA, now Garden Organic), excelled at getting publicity. 'Give up smoking bonfires' was one of Lawrence's most successful campaigning leaflets. It was produced in response to a report that came out in the 60's, that identified the health dangers of bonfire smoke. According to cancer specialist, Professor F. C. Pybus, bonfire smoke was more hazardous to health than smoking. Lawrence's common-sense answer to this air pollution problem was, of course, to suggest making leafmould and compost instead.

Prof. Pybus donated £500 to HDRA to pay for printing the leaflet to be distributed free of charge to council rate payers. When Jackie and Alan Gear moved to Rugby, around 20 years later, they were delighted to find a copy of the leaflet on their new doorstep, delivered with the other council papers.

Lawrence's message is equally important today, albeit that bonfires are less common than they used to be. An updated version of his leaflet could be titled 'Give up stuffing all those autumn leaves and garden waste into your council collection bin ...'. There is, I'm sure, a lot to be said for centralised recycling, but the 'Green waste' bin has had negative consequences, undermining much of the good work done by Garden Organic in getting people to make compost at home. Garden waste and autumn leaves are less likely to be recycled in home gardens now, but their value to householders has probably increased.

It is amazing how things come around. Until the 50s, leafmould was one of the 'go-to' ingredients for potting mixes, not peat. Now peat is on the way out leafmould is more valuable than ever.

Leafmould is made simply from autumn leaves that fall, free of charge, every year. Transforming them into this valuable end product for use in the garden takes hardly more time and effort than it does to load the leaves into a council collection bin.

## TIPS FOR MAKING LEAFMOULD

- All deciduous leaves can be used but some species take longer to break down than others.
- Leaves rot best when wet, so collect them up after rain.
- Small quantities are best stuffed into black plastic sacks. Pierce a few holes in the bag.
- Large quantities will sit in a standalone heap, or can be corralled in a wire mesh cage.

Further information on making and using leafmould can be found at [www.gardenorganic.org.uk/leafmould](http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/leafmould)