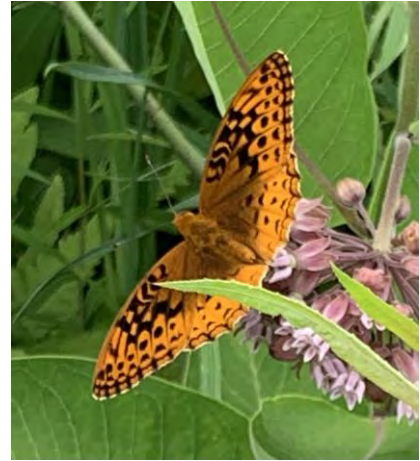


AUTUMN LEAVES

BY TERRY BONACE

Here is something to consider when pondering the fate of all of the leaves that come down between October and March in Beverly Shores: leave (no pun intended) them in place. Leaves perform many valuable functions for our environment and should not be regarded merely as an annual nuisance.

In addition to retaining moisture from rainfall and providing valuable organic material and nutrients for your soil, these leaves harbor an amazing diversity of wildlife. Many butterfly and moth species overwinter in leaf litter either as eggs, pupae, or even as adults. The great spangled fritillary, a beautiful, speckled orange butterfly, is just one of them. This fritillary lays its eggs in early fall, and, when the eggs hatch, the caterpillars crawl into leaf litter for the winter. The luna moth, one of the most beautiful moths in North America, requires leaf litter for overwintering. As a caterpillar, the luna moth eats many of our local trees and shrubs, including black walnut, sumac, willow and black cherry and is known from the Dunes region. Caterpillars, butterflies and moths are prized not only for their beauty, but also are very important pollinators and a good source of food for birds feeding their young in the spring.



Great Spangled Fritillary



Luna Moth

Countless other insects and invertebrates use the leaves or the protected soil beneath as homes. Bumble bees and other native bees, so important as pollinators, nest in the ground or in hollowed out stems, which are often cleaned up with the leaves. Lightning bugs live **underneath leaves and in dead wood before emerging in summer as adults.**

Small vertebrate animals depend on the leaves too. Toads and wood frogs both find refuge in leaves and dense vegetation during the hot days of summer. In winter, wood frogs take shelter in fallen leaves and produce an anti-freeze substance to survive the cold. Even bats make use of the leaf litter. The eastern red bat seeks protection in leaf litter when temperatures become very cold.

Not everyone will want to leave all of their leaves on the ground all year around. But there are strategies you can use to protect many of these creatures. Leave some areas in your property as “reserves” where you never rake the leaves or remove dead branches. For the rest of the property, where you can, wait to clean up the garden until daytime temperatures consistently stay in the 50s.

When you do remove some leaves, consider making compost of them. This compost makes healthy soil for your flowers and vegetables. Leaves also make excellent mulch when chopped up. This mulch is far better for your soil than chunks of bark and much cheaper.

Visit our web site at <http://www.bserg.org> for information on native and non-native invasive plants. As always, the Environmental Restoration Group (ERG) will be glad to help identify plants for you and make suggestions for native replacements. Contact Terry Bonace (tbonace@gmail.com) or Candice Smith (candicepetersonsmith@gmail.com) for assistance.