

The biggest of the silver maple trees in our yard keeps its leaves longer than the others. It was not until yesterday, after a nineteen degree morning, that the tree began to shed its summer foliage. Then, it rained golden leaves for hours, coating the porch and yard and rustling underfoot.

There are five silver maples in our yard. I have written about the biggest of them many times, because it has dominated our yard and dwarfed our cabin all of the forty plus years we have lived in this spot. It was a big tree when we built the house, and it is still growing. We regret that we did not measure Great-grandfather Lars Augustinessen's tree when we were putting up the cabin. It is now 23 feet 9 inches in circumference at a height of four feet.

The big silver maple is the parent to the other four trees in the yard. We planted them in the 1970s, and although they don't begin to match the size of their originator yet, they are not small saplings anymore, either. They range in circumference from 8 feet nine inches, the smallest, to 19 feet two inches, the largest. That tree, though, we had to measure at only two feet from the ground because of its multiple trunks any higher. Two of these younger trees have proven to be pretty good maple sap producers, too.

The most valuable product of these trees, though, is summer shade. The house is much cooler in hot weather than it was when the big maple had to do the job all alone. And, the other, more tangible product is leaves. Since these silver maples don't seem to lose their leaves as rapidly as some other hardwoods, there is a constant drift of spent foliage on the ground for weeks in the fall. If we were leaf rakers, we would be frustrated.

However, we are not. Of all the useless jobs that people assign themselves, I can't think of anything much more unnecessary than raking leaves. For some reason, fallen leaves in a woodlot don't bother anyone, but in the vicinity of our dwellings, we are upset by Mother Nature's action in divesting herself of summer finery.

There are drifts of leaves in our yard now. By spring, they will be mostly gone, and after one mowing (another task that we do much less frequently and with a great deal less fussiness than some people) one could wonder what ever happened to that blanket of fallen leaves that had covered the yard the past October.

There are those who rue the coming of late fall—the bare trees, the gray-brown landscape, the chilly winds. For me, it is perhaps the best time of year. The country opens up, and one can see so much more of our surroundings. And the air clears somehow, and brings life into sharper focus. The chill in the breeze, the “thinness” of the sunshine, the depth of the clouds—November is coming and does not distress us.

So, we will rustle through the leaves on our way out of the yard until one day, perhaps when we don't even expect it, those leaves will be covered and subdued by a layer of white. And, I'll have spent the fall doing something more interesting and productive than raking leaves.