

life lessons and fall leaves

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Raking our yard is no small task. Our trees shed their leaves slowly, so just when we've made progress we wake up to a new canvas of orange, red and brown covering the grass. Also, the backyard abuts conservation land, adding a whole crop of leaves from trees that don't even live on our property.



My kids and I started tackling the foliage on Veteran's Day. They didn't have school and I promised a trip to Dunkin' Donuts if we got a lot done (standing in the yard twirling the rake didn't count). We worked all morning, but barely made a dent. That weekend (conveniently, since my husband was home) it poured, so we couldn't continue. The following week, the kids and I kept at it, for an hour each day after school. They were excited by the visible results (and astonishingly, I got a minimal amount of complaining about the chore). "Look Mom, we've done a ton-we can see the grass now!"

Yesterday, as I was chasing a few last leaves behind our swing set and playhouse, I realized that only a tiny corner of our lot still needed to be raked (of course there are two trees that haven't started shedding, but I'm not counting those). I realized that raking leaves is no different than any other seemingly overwhelming task. The key to accomplishing big to-dos is simple.

- Be realistic. Recognize how long accomplishing a given task takes. Raking all the leaves was a big project -and I had to accept that it wouldn't be done in a day.
- Learn to live with a job in-progress. My busy life meant that I couldn't dedicate two or three whole days to the yard. It would be partly-done for a week or so (and if you're perfectionist like me that can be challenging).
- Dedicate a specific amount of time to the task daily. I was amazed at how much we accomplished in an hour at a day. Watching the leaves disappear bit by bit was as rewarding as collecting them all at once.
- Enjoy the work. I actually like raking. I like being outside; I enjoy my kids' company and the

thought of our family pulling together to complete a project. I only dreaded it at first because the enormity of the task made it seem impossible. My kids even had fun working. Imagine my shock when my eight-year old said to me this morning, "Mom, I think we can finish all the leaves tonight before it gets dark."

Take a good look at the tasks you've been avoiding. Decide on a realistic timeline, work a bit each day, don't expect perfection, and cross a dreaded task off your list.