

Wanted: Leaves

By [Kevin O'Flynn](#)

November 10, 2010



When the two people, half visible in the dark, saw the black plastic rubbish bag on the side of the courtyard, it seemed that there was only one thing to do. Hands went down, grabbing the black plastic so as to free the prisoners inside.

The leader of the rebellion said, “Fly! Be free,” as the prisoners flew for a second before flopping on the ground and lying there looking wet and yellow.

Little did they know that a few days before, the rebellion had already begun in earnest when residents in the south of Moscow had confronted the kidnappers in orange — the fall killers who have been sweeping Moscow’s leaves up from the city’s grounds. After a tussle, the prisoners were freed there, too.

The saga of the missing leaves is a regular theme of Moscow falls in recent years as *dvorniki* sweep them up and locals grumble about being in a city where environmental awareness is being aware that you can get away with chopping down trees because of the low fines.

You can sweep away the leaves at the side of the road because they are full of bad stuff, said

Vyacheslav Pankov, head of the Ecologists Guild. The exhausts of a thousand or so cars a day turns the leaves into a polluted mulch, but just a few feet away when the leaves land on Moscow's parched soil, it is a different matter.

"You should never sweep leaves from soil because it is a precious layer," Pankov said.

This yellow and brown layer — if things went as normal — is then covered in a layer of snow where it rots away feeding the soil with its nutrients. In turn, the trees then produce more leaves that jump to their deaths from branches the next year and the process begins again.

But recent years have seen the leaves swept away and disappear. One blogger joked that someone was paying a dollar a leaf; others looked at the spacemen backpack vacuum cleaners that adorn the yard sweepers, or the sit-down leaf cleaners that are taken out for a month or two a year and wondered if, if it were just possible — hard as it is to believe — that the city had wasted money on such fancy technical equipment not purely because of an illogical OCD worry about leaves.

Now that the secrets of the Luzhkov era are being revealed or judiciously leaked one by one, perhaps we will learn of a former city official ability to turn leaves into gold.

As the two freedom fighters walked away from the courtyard previously bald and now with a small patch of leaves in a corner, they came to the luckiest tree in the area, swamped in all the leaves taken from elsewhere.

"If only we had a shovel," said the rebel leader.

Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2010/11/10/wanted-leaves-a2878>