



TOWN OF
**CHAPEL
HILL**



Leave Your Leaves 2025

Key Collaborators:

Orange County | Town of Carrboro | Town of Chapel Hill |
Town of Hillsborough | New Hope Bird Alliance

Introduction

Statement of Purpose

The Leave Your Leaves initiative promotes environmentally friendly yard maintenance through the simple act of letting leaves remain as opposed to disposing of them. This small and easy change supports our local environment in several ways, including improved soil health and biodiversity, reduced flooding, and decreased usage of loud, gas-powered leaf blowers. Because these benefits multiply with every house participating in leaving their leaves, the Town of Chapel Hill seeks to continue expanding the reach of this initiative.

Overview

This report explores the logistics and successes of the 2025 Leave Your Leaves season. Additionally, we explore ways to improve and expand the program in future years to continue uplifting the practice of leaving your leaves.

Participation & Partnerships

Site Partners & Yard Sign Distribution

Overview

From the start of October through the end of November 2025, 210 Orange County residents pledged to leave their leaves. In combination with the 2023 and 2024 seasons, the cumulative pledge count of Leave Your Leaves is 605. Based on a survey of 2023 and 2024 pledgees conducted in December 2025-January 2026, we conservatively estimate a high proportion (over 90%) of all pledgees are continuing to practice leaving their leaves. This survey had a 45% response rate.

Spatial Distribution of Participants

In 2025, Leave Your Leaves (LYL) reached across the entirety of Orange County for the second time. Figure 1 shows the distribution of where new participants in 2025 reside. Participation was counted by completing a pledge form and/or taking a yard sign.

Most new 2025 participants live in Chapel Hill.

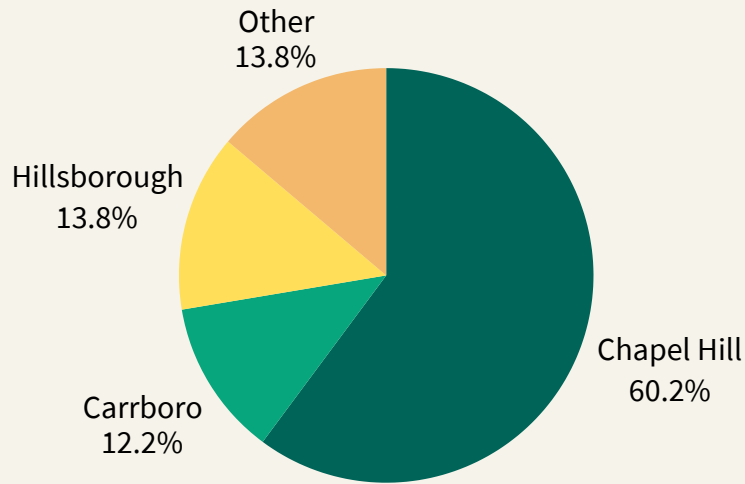


Figure 1. Distribution of pledges by jurisdiction of residence. Other includes additional jurisdictions in Orange County as well as pledges taken by participants located outside of Orange County.

Looking across the 605 participants from 2023, 2024, and 2025, the distribution remains similar: 54% of these pledges come from Chapel Hill, 18% from Carrboro, 15% from Hillsborough, and 12% from other parts of Orange County. This is displayed in Figure 2 below.

The relatively even geographic distribution of participants indicates that LYL has successfully become a county-wide initiative, drawing in support and collaboration from across our various partner jurisdictions.

Percentage of pledges in 2025 followed the same geographic pattern as previous years.

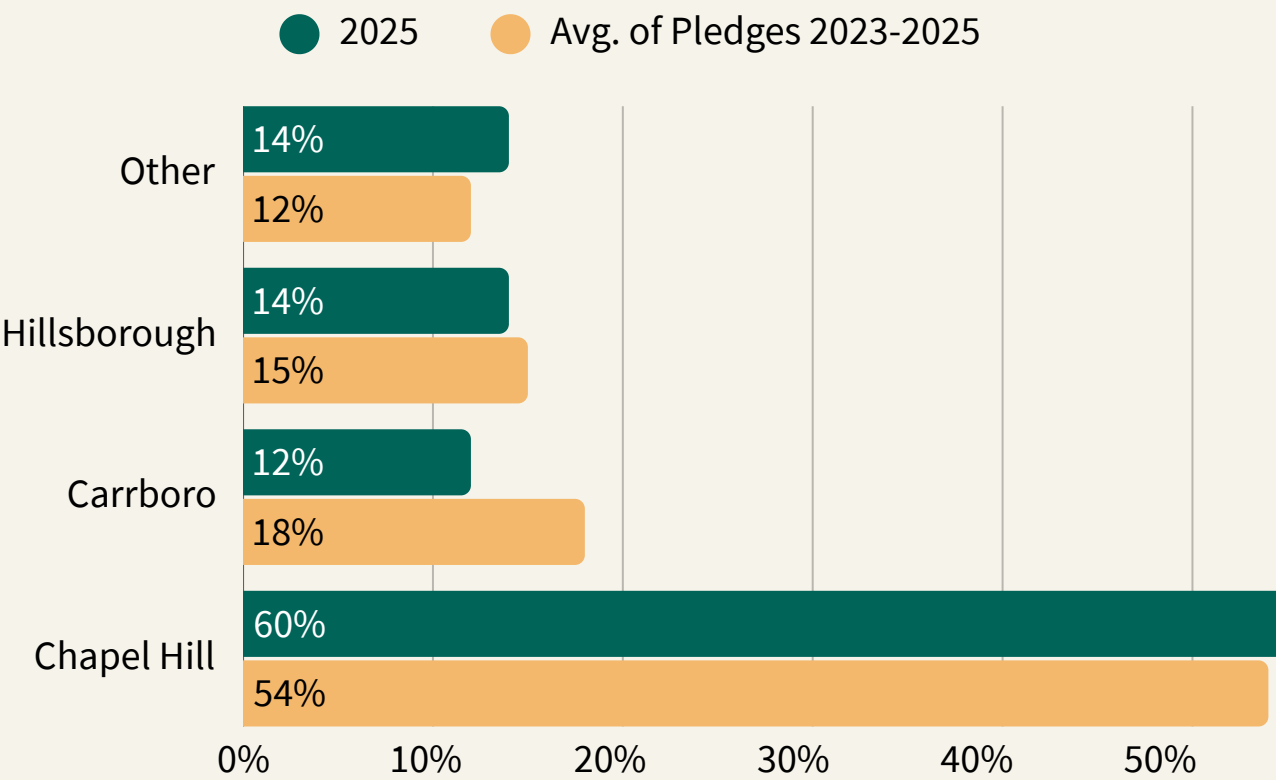


Figure 2. Percentage of participants in each jurisdiction in the 2025 season compared to across the 2023, 2024, and 2025 seasons.

Site Descriptions

Five sites across Orange County served as hubs for the Leave Your Leaves program in 2025, including two in Chapel Hill, one in Carrboro, and two in Hillsborough. At these sites, community members could learn about the program from informational displays and staff, sign pledges, and opt in for free yard signs to further promote the program in their own local network. Of the five permanent sites, the Carrboro Drakeford Library Complex was a new addition for the 2025 season following its opening earlier in the year. Overall, approximately half of the total 2025 in person pledges were filled out at The Chapel Hill Public Library. In addition to the permanent pledging sites, in person pledging was accessible at two events held in October and November 2025.

Most 2025 in person pledges occurred at the Chapel Hill Library.

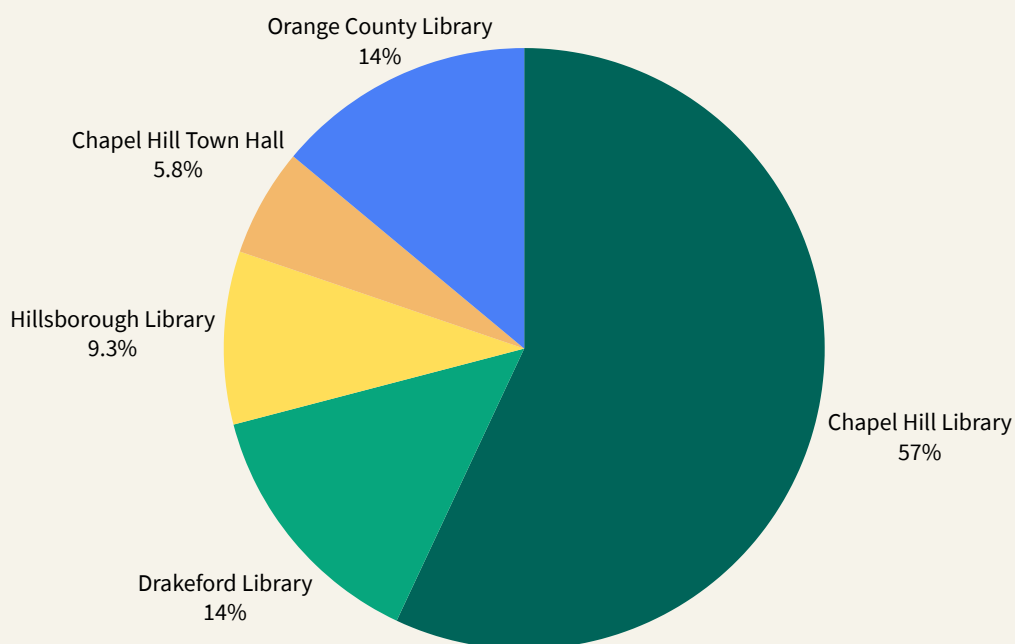


Figure 3. Distribution of pledges by location. The Drakeford Library Complex is located in Carrboro, and the Orange County Library is located in Hillsborough.

Pledging Distribution

Of the total new participants who filled out a formal pledge (123), approximately 70% pledged via hardcopy form and 30% pledged online. This indicates that while in person engagement is a key component of the pledging process, maintaining an online option remains important to capture a significant portion of the pledges. An additional 87 participants pledged only by taking a sign.

Most 2025 pledges were made by hardcopy form.

70%

Paper

30%

Online

Figure 4. Distribution of formal pledges by method.

Comparison Between Seasons

Season Length

The 2025 LYL season was significantly shorter than the 2023 and 2024 seasons, running from October 1 to November 30. Comparatively, 2023's season ran from September 7 to December 28 and 2024's ran from August 5 to January 5, 2024. This means the 2025 season lasted for 91 days compared to 112 and 154 in 2023 and 2024, respectively. One reason for this shortening of seasons is the retention of pledgees from past years: as the program continues to expand, many participants reuse their signs without re-pledging, decreasing the need for an extended distribution season.

A comparison of campaign season lengths 2023-2025.

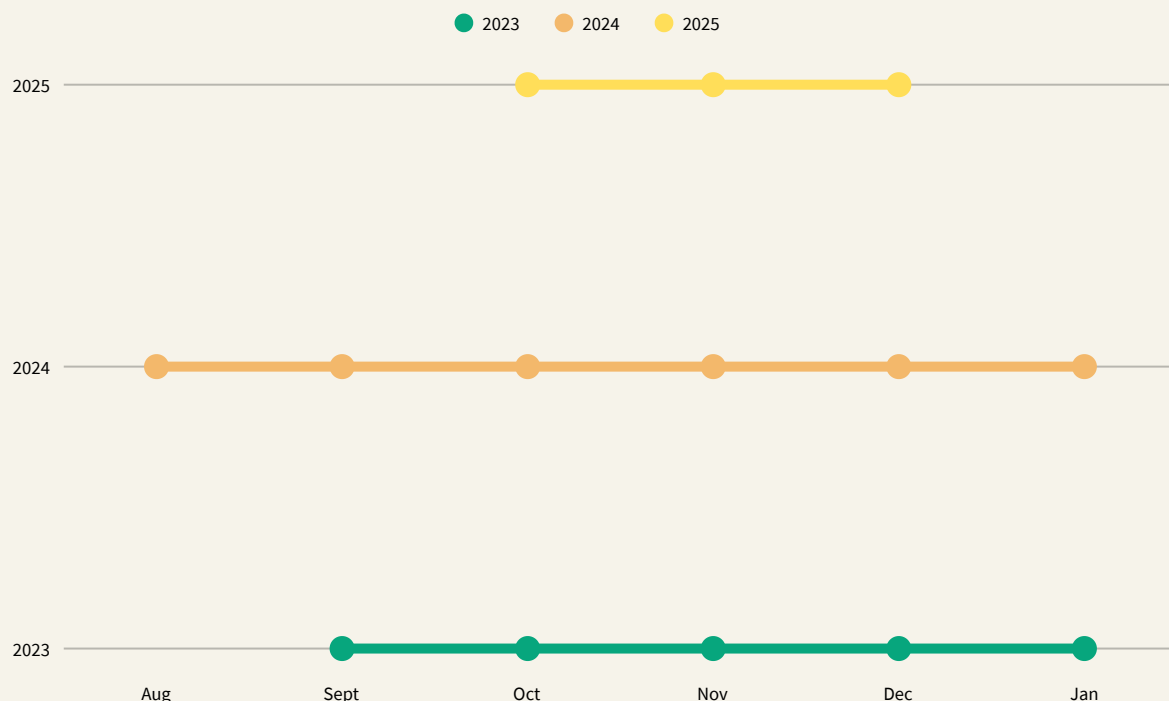


Figure 5. Length of the 2023, 2024, and 2025 LYL seasons, by month.

Season Outreach

The 2025 season emphasized community outreach and promotion. There were two events in October and November where Leave Your Leaves was promoted. These events were supplemental to the permanent information sites located at the five pledging locations across Orange County.

On October 11th, pledges were collected at the Extension Master Gardener Volunteers of OC & NC Cooperative Extension's PlantFest. On November 13th, the Chapel Hill Public Library collected pledges at the Trees for the Triangle Arbor Day event. This event otherwise involved a tree-planting demonstration and a discussion of native species.

Finally, the Leave Your Leaves campaign was also promoted through a social media campaign on the Town's Instagram account. The campaign included an instructional video that received over 6,000 views.

Community Feedback

“This program is **critical to the health of our fragile ecosystem and wildlife.**”

“I have found so many animals/insects under the leaves and love that our yard is more hospitable for life.”

“Great program!”

“I love the program! And the sign helps make the statement that **I’m being intentional and beneficial, not neglectful.**”

“Thank you for offering this information and the signs!”

“Well done for doing this! **I have always left my leaves**, even those on my small lawn. These I mow over and they mulch in.”

Program Improvement Ideas

Overview

Looking forward, there are multiple ways LYL could be expanded and adapted to further promote its cause of improving the environment and building community in neighborhoods across Orange County. Information was collected from a participant survey to isolate the most important feedback to account for in future seasons of LYL. The overarching theme of the feedback was a need to prioritize and clarify communication between the Town and residents who are interested in LYL. Specific ideas include revamped branding and yard signs with more program information, community promotion, and further expansion throughout Orange County. Staff from the participating jurisdictions and partners will consider these suggestions as we look ahead to next year's campaign.

Branding & Signage Improvements

Some community members recommended alternative branding for LYL to clarify the program's intentions. These recommendations included 'Use Your Leaves' and 'Leave Your Leaves for the Environment.' While this would require an overhaul of materials, it may streamline messaging around LYL. Additionally, some suggested that the program's yard signs could be improved to more effectively explain the program's purpose and methods to passersby. A slight redesign with additional information would allow unknowing Orange County residents to quickly digest the LYL mission upon seeing the sign. On balance, the process for the current design was thoroughly vetted and is a recognized brand.

Similarly, a pamphlet could be designed and distributed alongside yard signs with more in-depth information. This would allow participants to have easy access to any information they may forget about the program and would be a resource to distribute to others who are interested in learning more.

Community Engagement

One key outreach activity LYL has yet to fully utilize is community-based education and promotion. Existing community organizations, including homeowners' associations, afterschool programs, and neighborhood resources such as listservs and block parties, could be connected with via community members passionate about LYL. This would bridge the gap between individual- and community-level participation, increasing the overall efficacy of the program. Existing pre-season and in-season events are opportunities for collaboration between the Town and community groups. Additionally, conversations within communities about general misconceptions and the purpose of leaving your leaves would clarify the behavior of participating neighbors—a concern mentioned in our survey of participants.

Expansion

Figure 6 displays the participation of each Orange County jurisdiction compared to their proportion of the county's overall population. Each of the towns have participation levels that exceed their portion of the Orange County total population.

Program participation in the towns exceeds their proportion of the Orange County population.

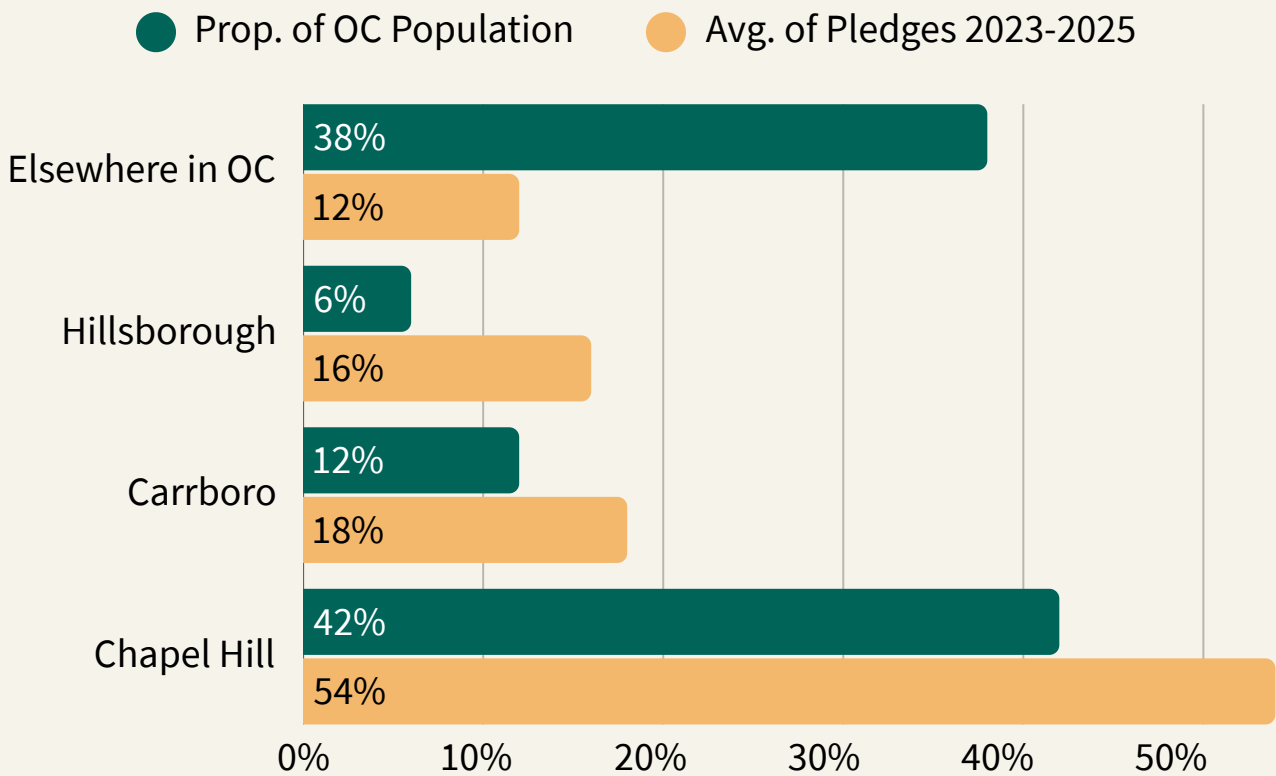


Figure 6. Jurisdiction-level participation in LYL vs. proportion of Orange County's total population. Elsewhere in OC includes areas outside of Hillsborough, Carrboro, and Chapel Hill. Percentages in the yellow bars are an average of the pledges made during the campaigns from 2023-2025.

It should be noted that the LYL program may be less appealing to residents living in unincorporated Orange County due to a longer tradition of leaving their leaves combined with other factors like larger property sizes, more natural areas, and fewer landscaping restrictions (e.g., HOA rules).