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Discover Nature With MDC

As the heat of summer fades to the cool weather of fall, trees and shrubs around the Show-Me State transform from leaves of green to a fall-foliage color palette of golds, reds, oranges, and purples. The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) encourages people to discover nature through fall-color adventures.

“People can travel anywhere in Missouri and find a variety of trees that show off a fantastic array of color in the fall,” said MDC Resource Forester Cory Gregg.

Gregg explained that leaves turn colors when two things happen.

“First, sugars produced by photosynthesis are trapped inside leaves by chilly - but not freezing - autumn nights,” he said. “Those sugars are the building blocks for red, yellow, orange, and purple pigments. Cool nights simultaneously cause the breakdown of green pigments, allowing these other colors to show through.”

A wide variety of trees around the state means Missourians have a fall-color season that can last four to six weeks. Sassafras, sumac, and Virginia creeper are some of the earliest foliage to change, beginning in mid-September. By late September, black gum, bittersweet, and dogwoods are turning.

The color change starts earliest in northern Missouri and moves southward across the state. The peak of fall color in Missouri is usually around mid-October. This is when maples, ashes, oaks, and hickories are at the height of their fall display. Normally by late October, the colors are fading and the leaves start to drop from the trees.

Viewing fall color

For spectacular vistas, MDC recommends routes along rivers with views of forested bluffs, and along ridges with sweeping scenes of forested landscapes. On a smaller scale, find fall color through drives on back roads, hikes, or float trips under a colorful forest canopy. Conservation areas and state parks are also great places to visit for fall color.

“Even treeless areas, such as prairies and roadsides, display beautiful shades of gold, purple, olive, and auburn with autumn wildflowers, shrubs, and grasses,” Gregg said. “In cities and towns, enjoy places with mature trees, such as older neighborhoods, parks, and even cemeteries.”

Weekly fall color updates

MDC offers weekly online fall-color updates from Department foresters all over the state. The updates include species of trees that are turning and recommendations for where to see them. Get fall color updates from MDC online at mdc.mo.gov/fallcolor.