



Predicting fall color

Seasonal foliage predictions are a mixture of science, history, folklore, and guesswork that range from plausible to downright superstitious. While no one can say for certain when foliage will peak each year, there are some general guidelines. Here are some indicators and tips that will help. A common adage is that if the summer is hot and dry, the leaves will turn early.



Foliage forecasters look for above average rainfall to predict an earlier, showier leaf season. While that's generally true - trees do seem to produce more colorful pigments after dry season - all it takes is a rainy August to throw predictions off. Because of their brilliant hues of red and orange, maple trees are the benchmark for the peak of leaf season.

The experts say leaves have both yellow and green pigments, all the time. When the days shorten and temperatures drop, the green chlorophyll breaks down, revealing the yellow. An early frost will hasten the color change while a warm, wet autumn will delay it. Maple trees show more red color when they're stressed, especially if they've had lower nitrogen during the growing season. The effects of factors like pollution, drought, and the climate change are still scientifically unknown, though it stands to reason that environmental stressors are likely to have an impact. I never was able to find a definitive answer to predicting the peak date for fall foliage, though I've certainly seen lots of opinions.



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