

Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
Bureau of Forestry

PENNSYLVANIA WEEKLY FALL FOLIAGE REPORT

September 22 - 28, 2016

Autumn has begun

Pennsylvania Fall Foliage

Percent of full color in each zone



We experienced some unusually warm, dry weather patterns in parts of Pennsylvania this year and in some locations this has caused premature development of the abscission layer at the base of the leaf stem to protect the tree from moisture loss. This situation occurs when trees are growing on dry, shallow or rocky soils or there is a deep seated drought in place.

These extreme conditions are somewhat localized, so across the broad vistas of Penn's Woods we should still see panoramas of beautiful fall colors. Of late, we have seen some comfortable, sunny days and cooler nights and even some precipitation in many areas.

Fall colors are just beginning to show in Penn's Woods. The great variety of tree species in Pennsylvania provides arguably the world's best autumn spectacle. Trees that provide brilliant red and orange displays include red maple, sumac, blackgum, dogwood and serviceberry. Yellow and orange tones are provided birch, tulip tree, sugar maple, aspen, hickory, walnut, and sycamore.

Sassafras and cherry can sport a variety of colors on a single tree. There is wonderful color somewhere in Pennsylvania throughout the end of September and the month of October.

There are some very dry parts of the state, but even these will have areas of brilliant color this fall in locales that were not as exposed to a lack of rainfall. Some areas have deeper soils with more organic matter which tends to retain more moisture.

In areas of rocky soils and shallow soils over clay subsoils, water can become a major issue for trees much more quickly than in deeper soils. Also important is the aspect of the slopes where the trees are growing. Trees exposed to the sun in the heat of the day on south and west facing slopes are subjected to greater heat stress than trees that are growing on northern or east facing slopes which only receive direct sun in the morning.

So this year's fall foliage will be a study of tree microclimate. This is the climatic environment directly around the individual trees and then more broadly, the microclimatic conditions of a group of trees encompassing acres, to square miles, to entire forest district size areas.



New England Aster and Canada Goldenrod – classic fall colors
Photo Cecile Stelzer PA DCNR

NORTHERN ZONE

Minimal signs of fall are starting to appear in Northern Zone, 5 – 10% color. Only a couple of tree species have started the process of changing color. White ash, birch species, striped maple, and some sugar maple are slowly starting to turn yellow. The color change is currently spotty throughout the region. Two weeks from now visitors to the area can expect some great fall color viewing.

CENTRAL ZONE

The east of the Central zone is a little further along with the fall change with Wayne and Pike counties showing from 10 to 20% of full color. Foliage seekers can see some color by driving Route 6, Route 29, and Bear Lake & Bear Creek roads on the northern border of the Pocono Plateau.

As we move westward minimal signs of fall are starting to appear in Tioga State Forest. Only a couple of tree species have started the process changing color. White Ash, birch species, striped maple, and some sugar maple are slowly starting to turn yellow. The color change is spotty throughout the region. The color development is 5 – 10% of full color.

In the far northwest of the region is experiencing 1 – 3% of color development. As if to welcome the first day of autumn, there is some initial fall coloration in a few scattered trees, mostly maple species, in northwestern Pennsylvania. Much of the current color on the landscape is being displayed by the understory plants with purple asters and bright yellow goldenrods in full bloom. Most of the trees are still green but the keen eye can notice that the

green color is beginning to fade and will soon be replaced by the bright colors of fall. This week and upcoming weekend is scheduled to have bright warm sunny days and cooler nights which should bring on the fall colors to the area.

The southwest corner of the region is around 0 – 5% developed. Expected date to reach peak color here is October 10-20th.

LAUREL HIGHLANDS

This area in southwest PA is crossed by Route 30 and 31, Interstate 40, and the Pennsylvania Turnpike. From these roads a great deal of the Laurel Highlands can be accessed.

This includes the highest point in the state - Mt. Davis. Because of the elevation of this area, it develops fall color a week to ten days earlier than the surrounding lowlands. The higher region is beginning to turn ever so slightly.

The long high ridge of Laurel Mountain is also beginning to turn. Blackgum are always the first trees to begin changing color in September on the mountain. Red maples and beeches are also beginning to change very slightly. The best color will likely occur in the second week of October.

The southwest corner, Greene, Washington and Fayette counties, is usually slower to change than adjacent highlands due to the geography. However, due to dry conditions in the area it is likely that peak foliage display will occur earlier than usual here this year. Yellow poplars are beginning to change already. Peak color will likely occur sometime between the second and third week in October.

SOUTHERN REGION (The area south and east of a line from the lower southeast to the Laurel Highlands)



(Change starting on the Raystown Branch of the Juniata River)



(Roadside colors in Schuylkill County. Red Poison Ivy, yellows of birch and greenbrier)

(Photos David A. Schmitt PaDCNR)

The areas of higher elevation throughout this region will have some elements of fall coming to life but we have two to three weeks to go for the big show. Route 30 and the Pennsylvania Turnpike between Carlisle and the Allegheny front are good places to see the beginnings of the fall colors. Route 81 north from the Susquehanna River to Wilkes-Barre can also provide some great views.