

After a long summer drought, Pennsylvania forests were quenched by some much-needed rainfall this month, arresting premature leaf drop. Fall seemed to arrive right on time, and seasonable to below-average temperatures should compel steady changes throughout commonwealth forests. Drier forests this summer meant fewer leaf fungi observed throughout the state, setting the stage for what could be a notably vivid fall season.

Northwestern Region

The district manager in Cornplanter State Forest District (Warren, Erie counties) said early fall color on some maples greeted the first day of autumn. Shrubs like dogwoods and sumac are showing pretty colors along the roadsides. Fall flowering plants, such as purple asters and bright goldenrods, are in full bloom and adding to the early fall display. Most of the trees are still green but keen observers will notice that the green color is beginning to fade and will soon be replaced by the bright colors of fall.



Forest edges in northwestern PA are full of glorious color. (photo by C. Stelter)

Northcentral Region

The district manager in Susquehannock State Forest (Potter, McKean counties) indicated that maples have started to change, with red maple most impressive. South-facing slopes seem to be more favorable for nice color, currently. Peak color for northern hardwoods is expected to begin around October 8, and late October for oaks.



Pleasant early color at the Susquehannock State Forest office in Coudersport, Potter County. (photo by C. Nicholas)



Maple color on Denton Hill. (photo by N. Confer)

Foresters in Loyalsock State Forest (Lycoming, Sullivan counties) said the color transition is just starting with maples. Trees on wet soils seem to be the earliest to change; for some good scenery visit Sones Pond or some of the swamps along the bridge and ski trails between Eagles Mere and Shanerburg Road. Peak color in the area is estimated to occur the weekend of October 15.

The Tioga State Forest district manager said fall color is progressing on schedule, with maples highlighting the early display. Higher elevations seem to be showing the most impressive fall color in the region, currently. Peak foliage in the area is expected in mid-October.

Forestry staff in Sproul State Forest (Clinton, northern Centre counties) said fall color is just starting to be seen on the upper plateau, but a bit muted in areas that were heavily defoliated by spongy moth caterpillars. Peak foliage is expected in mid-October.



Red maple color, Schofield Road, Moshannon State Forest. (photo by R. Conrad)

The Clearfield County Service Forester (Moshannon Forest District) reported little progress. Currently, only individual red maples are turning scarlet and orange. Understory black gums and sassafras are turning a nice orange and red, respectively, but only in a few areas. Ferns are starting to turn bright yellow. A drive on Caledonia Pike in the Frenchville area will reveal scattered black gum and sassafras.

Foresters in Elk State Forest (Elk, Cameron counties) reported very little color change in the oak-dominated forests of the district. Peak color is expected in the region in two to three weeks.

West-central and Southwestern Regions



In northern Clear Creek Forest District, leaves are just starting to turn, primarily because of the dry summer. Black walnut, big tooth aspen, birch, and a few others are yellowing. Black gums are just starting to turn, with a few red leaves dotting the crowns. Dogwood shrubs, sumac, Virginia creeper, and poison ivy are a brilliant red. The goldenrod and asters are in full bloom. MK Goddard State Park, looking across Lake Wilhelm, is a good place to see some nice early color.

*Fields in Clear Creek Forest District are showing signs of fall.
(photo by D. Cole)*



Highpoint Lake Overlook. (photo by R. Mahony)

In Forbes State Forest District, all six southwestern counties are beginning to change, however the ridges are further along. The Laurel Ridge (Somerset and Westmoreland mountains), Chestnut Ridge (Westmoreland and Fayette mountains), and Mt. Davis (Somerset Mountain) ridgeline are all progressing similarly. A few patches of trees are already vibrant while most others are still very green. With the weather forecast of consistently mild daytime temperatures and cool, crisp nighttime conditions, spectacular fall colors are likely this year. A scenic drive up Laurel Mountain through state forest land south to Mt. Davis is recommended to see some early color on black gums, maples, and cinnamon ferns.

Gallitzin State Forest (Blair, Indiana, Cambria counties) staff reported no significant fall foliage observations in the district.

Central and Southcentral Regions

In Bald Eagle State Forest District, the Mifflin, Juniata, and Union County service forester reported just a few black gums and urban red maples starting to turn red. Peak color in the area is two to three weeks away.

Bureau of Forestry staff at the Mira Lloyd Dock Center (near Potters Mills, Centre County in the Seven Mountains area) reported seeing signs of fall, with red, yellow, and orange beginning to show. Early season species such as red maples, sassafras, black cherry, and black gum are the key contributors. Some nice viewing areas for color seekers are many of the state forest roads and numerous vistas located throughout Bald Eagle and nearby Rothrock State forests.

In Tuscarora State Forest District (Perry, Juniata counties), green is by far the dominant color, but a few early indicators are showing a bit of color. These include spicebush, black gum, flowering dogwood, and Virginia creeper vine.

In Weiser State Forest District, the district manager indicated the fall transition has been minimal, but black gums are starting to change color (red), as are birch (yellow), and red maples. The noticeably colder nights should bring more color next week.



Roadside in Buchanan State Forest. (photo by K. Ewan)

In Buchanan State Forest (Franklin, Fulton, Bedford counties) foresters reported few indicators of fall color. Aside from a few dry stands of trees along hillsides, only black gums have begun to change to a bold crimson.

In Rothrock State Forest, Huntingdon County, no significant color was reported.

Leaves in Michaux State Forest (Adams, Franklin, Cumberland counties) are just starting to change. Black gum and some maple trees are a few species transitioning to fall color.



While most trees haven't changed color, a maple in front of the Michaux State Forest district office is showing off. (photo by S. Hartley)

Northeastern Region

In Delaware State Forest (Pike, Monroe counties), currently the best fall colors can be viewed at higher elevations. On high elevation swamps and waterways, red maple and highbush blueberry are starting to show vibrant red and burgundy colors. Hickories are starting to exhibit their fall yellows, and many other species are showing signs of change. The best places to see fall color on state forest is around the Promised Land area. Promised Land Lake, Bruce Lake, and Egypt Meadow Lake offer red maple and highbush blueberry along their shores. These areas also provide the chance to see native tamarack in its signature golden color.



Promised Land Lake. (photo by G. Beers)

Foresters in Pinchot State Forest said forests are rapidly changing with the recent onset of colder weather. Vibrant shades of red have appeared on black gums and red maples. While these colors stand out, most of the woods are still green. Sugar maples, aspens, and birches have started to change color, along with many other understory plants like fern and winterberry. Oaks and beech have yet to start changing, but emergence of color should be more apparent in a few days. The best places for viewing fall foliage in the area are Brownell Reservoir and Moosic Mountain (Pinchot State Forest lands) and Salt Springs and Ricketts Glen State parks.

Southeastern Region

Foresters in William Penn State Forest district report no significant fall foliage observations.