



## Fall Color Display

Is it really October? Where has this year gone? Fall is here which usually means cooler temperatures. I love being out in my yard this time of year, and what I *really* like about this time of year are the fall colors.

People always ask me when will be the best time to view the spectacular show put on by Mother Nature, but leaf color predictions can be tricky. The environmental factors that influence leaf color are difficult to predict, so knowing when the colors will peak is an annual mystery. Many of the factors that influence leaf color are related to weather conditions prior to and during the leaf color change. As we all know, specific weather conditions are very difficult to forecast in advance.

But you can depend on certain fall events to take place. The change in leaf color is triggered by shorter days of sunlight (photoperiod) which is constant from year to year. Temperature and moisture have an influence on the color change as well. Certain weather conditions generally yield these results:

- Warm, dry weather with extended drought – These conditions lead to fall color that is not vibrant, is short lived and the timing can be delayed a week or more.
- Cool nights and warm days – Cool nights with temperatures in the 40s and low 50s with daytime highs in the 60s and 70s tend to cause leaves to retain color longer. In the presence of these conditions the colors are more pronounced, especially if the days are sunny
- Sunny days vs. overcast days – Sunny days create more vibrant leaf color. Several rainy or overcast days in a row when leaves are turning color will cause them to be duller.
- Adequate moisture – A little rain will yield a longer period of leaf color
- Freezing overnight temperatures and early frost – Flashy forest fashion will quickly fade, leaves will turn brown and die

Leaf color changes occur first at the higher elevations where it is cooler, then progresses to the valleys at the lower elevations. Color in the mountains of East

Tennessee usually begins during the second week of October and advances to the valleys and the coastal plain of West Tennessee by the end of October. The colors may even last into the first two weeks of November.

I am heading to Knoxville later this month for a meeting. I am looking forward to seeing the beautiful fall colors in their full glory. Until next time, happy gardening!



*Christopher Cooper*