



The magic of autumn in Oklahoma

Oklahoma likely will still see some hot days, but for the most part, fall has arrived, bringing crisp morning temperatures, sunny days and cool evenings. While the leaves on the trees and the grass in the lawn currently is still pretty green, the brilliant colors of autumn soon will arrive.

We've all seen pictures of New England in the fall with colors so bright and vivid it looks like they're on fire. Although Oklahoma may not compare to the east coast, parts of our state can still have spectacular displays of vibrant reds, oranges and yellows.

What exactly causes those green leaves to turn colors in the fall? The green in leaves actually is chlorophyll, which is responsible for catching the sun's energy and converting it into energy for plant growth. During the summer, the chlorophyll is high and masks other pigments in the leaf. When fall approaches, the chlorophyll declines, and the other pigments shine through. Pigments that are present include anthocyanins, which are purple and red, and carotenoids and tannins, which provide the yellow, orange and brown hues.

Weather conditions also play a vital role in how vibrant our fall colors can be. Ideal weather conditions that lead to the spectacular fall colors are bright sunny days and cool nights. However, prolonged warm spells in the fall and cloudy, rainy weather can lead to poor fall color. Drier soil in fall, but not drought conditions, also lead to brighter fall colors.

Oklahoma features several areas with great opportunities for fall colors. With the COVID-19 pandemic, many people have been staying pretty close to home. Consider loading the family into the car, packing a picnic lunch and hitting the road for a much-needed day trip. Hike through an outdoor recreational area for fresh air and fall colors.

One of Oklahoma's most renowned fall foliage drives is the Talimena National Scenic Byway that runs through the Ouachita National Forest in the southeastern part of the state. Other options around the state include the Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge, Robbers Cave State Park, Roman Nose State Park, Great Salt Plains State Park, Chickasaw National Recreation Area and Boiling Springs State Park. Be sure to call or check online to ensure these areas will be open and accepting visitors.

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