

As summer ends, the colors that dance in a bonfire take over deciduous trees. Yellows, reds, and oranges mingle. The results are breathtaking with rich bronzes and deep russets. Foliage and fruit hues vary from year to year depending on the weather.

You can count on showy reds every fall, but they turn even more vivid when the days are sunny and the nights cooler than 45 degrees. Trees in hollows will be the first to color because the cold air settles to low spots and works its magic on chemicals in the leaves. Intense afternoon sun strengthens color, so the western sides of trees often carry the most brilliant hues in early autumn--something to remember when deciding where to put new deciduous trees.

The most vibrant colors appear after a warm, dry summer and early autumn rains. But a long rainy season in late fall makes them drab.

There's a subtle sequence in the show of fall color, although most of it happens in September and October. Trees and shrubs usually average two weeks of bright color.

Most of the berries and other fruits prized for their fall color stay bright through the winter--or attract fine-feathered visitors to dine.