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MDC Says Southeast Missouri Fall Colors Are Peaking

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Warm weather has subdued colors, but there are pockets of splendor to enjoy.

Cape Girardeau, Missouri - The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) says fall is at last in full splendor in southeast Missouri. White oaks, including post oaks, are moving to their russet colored leaves as the green is disappearing. Red oaks, including pin oak, shumard oak, and northern red oak also exhibit spectacles of auburn. Hickories continue their move, transforming into gold and flaxen qualities.

Jennifer Behnken, MDC's community forester for the southeast region, says the region's fall color has been delayed and subdued as compared to other years, due to warmer than usual temperatures. That doesn't mean there aren't views to enjoy though. Behnken recommends several routes in southeast Missouri that offer beautiful autumn-painted vistas and country scenes.

"I suggest Highway 21, especially in the Ironton and Arcadia Valley area for some pretty scenes," Behnken said, adding a recommendation for driving views along Highways 67, 32, 25, 21, 72, and 49.

"Places on the must see list include Buford Mountain Conservation Area, Hughes Mountain Natural Area, Johnson Shut Ins State Park, Taum Sauk State Park, and Elephant Rocks State Park," Behnken said.

In these areas, various species of trees add different colors to the scene. Eastern hophornbeam tints the forest mid-story with creamy yellow shades. Sumacs, dogwoods, and sassafras add ruby and pomegranate grandeur to accompany the tones of blonde. Silver maple trees join the group, some exhibiting lemony colors while others are ablaze in cherry. Sugar maples complete the color wheel, decorating the landscape in brilliance and beauty.

Behnken added that she's noticed persimmon trees across the region are loaded with fruits and the area's had a good overall crop of walnuts, hickories and acorns.

“Watch your footing as you enjoy a stroll through the neighborhoods, parks and conservation areas,” she cautioned. “Acorns, hickory nuts, and walnuts on the ground may require maneuvering adjustments to deter any accidental stumbles.”

Fall is a good time for actions other than enjoying the show, Behnken added.

“This is a great time for plantings,” she said. “I think fall planting is a bit better, since trees are entering dormancy and can focus growth on the roots instead of the leaves.”

But she cautioned fall planters to not forget to continue watering new plantings until the first frost sets in.

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