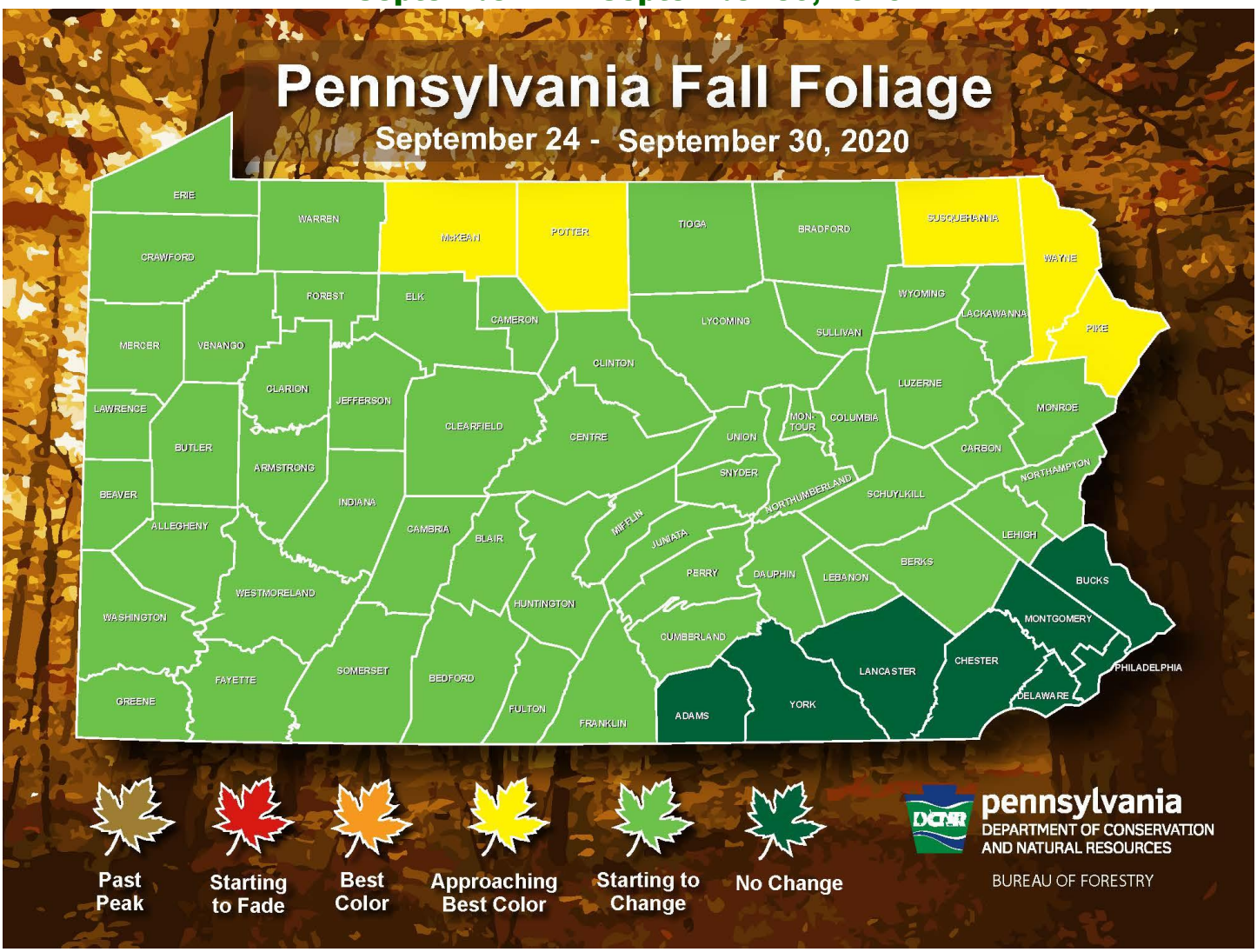
Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
Bureau of Forestry

PENNSYLVANIA WEEKLY FALL FOLIAGE REPORT

September 24 – September 30, 2020



To predict peak season from the colors, use these guidelines:

- Dark Green/No Change= peak is *three weeks to a month* away
- Light Green/Starting to Change= peak is *approximately two to three weeks* away
- Yellow/Approaching Best Color= peak is *approximately one week* away
- Orange/Best Color= foliage is *peaking this week*
- Red/Starting to Fade= still some nice color but won't last more than *a few more days*
- Brown/Past Peak= all or nearly all color *is gone*

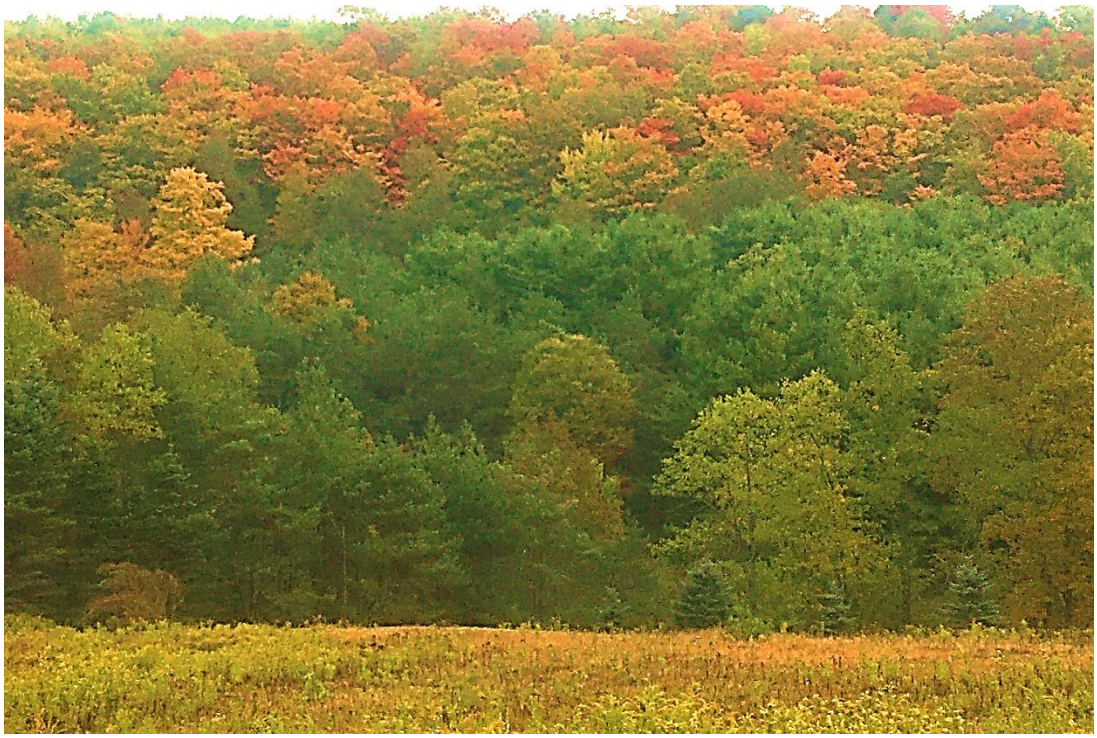
Statewide Fall Foliage Overview

Deep-green foliage is the norm for the state, currently, but many areas are showing signs of the season. Recent frosts and cool nights are pushing development of color, as species noted to change early are beginning to reveal. Black gums, birches, and maples are sprinkling reds and yellows throughout Penn's Woods. Drought conditions throughout a significant portion of the state could shorten what is expected to be a vibrant peak season. Forecasted rain beginning next week could quench commonwealth forests, preserving a long, colorful fall.

Northwestern Region
The district manager in Cornplanter State Forest District (Warren, Erie counties) reports a slight blush of color on some trees, specifically red maples, appearing to be the first to show their fall colors. Most of the overstory is still a lush green. The warm yellows of goldenrods and sunflowers with the deep purple of wild asters indicate fall is on its way. With warm days and cooler nights, northwest Pennsylvania seems to be easing into fall.

Asters and goldenrod (photo by C. Stelter)

Northcentral Region
The district manager reports that fall has arrived in Susquehannock State Forest (Potter, McKean counties). Red and sugar maples have started to change in the northern two-thirds of the forest district. Some cherry and birch have slightly yellowed and a few have dropped some leaves due to dry conditions. With recent frost and several freezing nights, the northern hardwoods peak is expected around the first full week of October followed by oaks later in October.



Potter County foliage is progressing quickly. (photo by C. Nicholas)

Bureau staff in Moshannon State Forest (Clearfield, Centre, Elk counties) report several recent frosts and a dry summer, conditions that usually contribute to good color. These conditions, along with relatively low incidence of leaf spot diseases, give an optimistic outlook on fall color. Individual red and sugar maples are just beginning to change color, with a few black gums turning red as well. The best places for current fall foliage viewing in the district are the Penfield and Quehanna areas, where a scenic drive along the Quehanna Highway will reveal some nice color. Peak foliage is expected here in early October.

The view from Mill Run Road, Moshannon State Forest (photo by R. Conrad)

Forestry personnel report a drought-stricken Tioga State Forest District (Tioga and Bradford counties) with hints of color change. Red maples are reddening, and sugar maples, striped maples, birch, and beech are turning yellow. Changes are not widespread yet. Areas with heavy components of northern hardwoods have some color and the oak forests remain green. The eastern half of the district is mainly northern hardwoods and shows the most color, currently. The best place to see color is around the town of Wellsboro. Peak is expected in mid-October.

Tioga State Forest atop Elk Run Vista remains green. (photo by T. Oliver)

Loyalsock State Forest staff report that dry weather has initiated early fall color, but progress has slowed. Recent frosts could speed up the process. Red, yellow, and orange maple and birch leaves have been among the first to turn along with many understory plants. Drier sites, particularly Sharp Top Vista, are progressing well.

Foresters in Clinton County (Sproul State Forest) have noted some early color on red maples. The area has been exceptionally dry, which could impact the duration of the fall foliage display.

Foresters report few changes in the oak-dominated forests of Elk and Cameron counties (Elk State Forest).

West-central and Southwestern Regions
The Lawrence/Mercer County (Clear Creek State Forest District) service forester reports leaves are starting to change. A light frost and cool nights have pushed maples, sumac, dogwood, black gum, and Virginia creeper vine to exhibit a beautiful burgundy color. Many black walnut trees, birches, and aspens are pale yellow. The season is setting up for perhaps the best fall foliage display in years.

Forbes State Forest staff report green predominating the forests of southwestern Pennsylvania, but the first splashes of fall color are beginning to show in black gum (red), black birch and black cherry (yellow), and maples showing yellow, red, and orange. Oaks remain fully green and will be one of the last species to change.

The 2020 growing season presented abnormally dry conditions which may impact localized areas of fall color, but beautiful overall fall color is anticipated. Recent frosts may jumpstart the season and the forecast indicates good conditions for fall color development.

A great place to kick off the fall foliage season is in the higher elevations of the Laurel Highlands on Chestnut and Laurel ridges. Visit Pennsylvania's highest point, Mt. Davis (3,213 ft), on Forbes State Forest, in southern Somerset County. These areas will be the first in southwestern Pennsylvania to show fall color and will peak up to two weeks earlier than surrounding lowlands.

Central and Southcentral Regions
In Bald Eagle State Forest, a few yellow, red, and orange leaves have been observed on ridges. There is a bit more color in the valleys with goldenrod blooms accentuating the field edges. In the Seven Mountains area, black gums are displaying bright red along with a slight change of yellow/red in red maples along roads. With recent nighttime temperatures in the 40s, peak color is expected during the second to third week in October.

Penns View Vista, Bald Eagle State Forest (photo by C. Neufer)

The Perry and Juniata County service forester (Tuscarora State Forest District) reports the area is still green overall, but very dry. Leaves are wilting in understory shrubs and some leaves have fallen prematurely.

In Weiser State Forest District, observers in Lebanon and Dauphin counties have noted a change “almost overnight”. Black walnut is pale yellow, and sugar maples have begun to turn yellow-orange. Understory spicebush is showing vivid fall hues. With recent dry days and cool to frosty nights, peak color in the region could be as few as ten days away.

Cheerful colors of spicebush, Lebanon County. (photo by R. Reed)

Early color along Shade Mountain Road near Beaver Springs (photo by C. Neufer)

In Buchanan State Forest (Franklin, Fulton, Bedford counties) a few black gums are changing to a dark red and birches are just beginning to yellow. State forest roads along ridgetops (and vistas along the way) are recommended for a scenic fall foliage drive. With fall foliage season underway, peak is expected in the region in mid-October.

Vibrant red maple (DCNR file photo)

In Rothrock State Forest, Huntingdon County, the late summer drought along with patchy frost has left foliage largely unaffected. Dogwoods and black gums are reddening while black birch, red maple, and walnut trees are showing a tinge of yellow. The northern portion of the district (southern Centre County) will have the most colorful leaves now until peak color, which is expected in mid-October.

Flowering dogwood, Rothrock State Forest (photo by J. Thompson)

The Michaux State Forest (Adams, Franklin, Cumberland counties) service forester reports the dry summer was hard on some species. Drought stress is showing in the form of yellowing and browning leaves. Otherwise, there has been no noteworthy transition to fall color in the forest district. Peak is estimated in mid- to late October.

Northeastern Region

Foresters in Delaware State Forest have reported exciting transitions to fall color. Black gums are adding some brighter red colors to the landscape. Red maples have begun to turn nice bright shades of red, mostly around the swamps and wet areas. Sugar maples have started to turn yellow/orange. Sassafras and poison ivy have been changing as well, contributing orange and red to the forest. The Tobyhanna area (Monroe County) is currently displaying some of the best color in the district.

Fall colors have begun in Delaware State Forest. (photo by J. Maza)

Foresters in Pinchot State Forest reported some red and sugar maples have started to change to bright red and pale yellow. Other species including birches, basswood, walnut, and aspen have started to change in pockets. Limited rain throughout most northeastern counties could hasten peak foliage this year. Good fall foliage viewing can currently be found in the Thornhurst and Equinunk tracts, Salt Springs and Prompton State parks, and Game Lands 70.

Southeastern Region

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