

# Fall Foliage: Washington, Oregon and Northern Idaho

Autumn shows the magnificent beauty of the Pacific Northwest, and AAA has identified [eight Fall Foliage Regions](#) for you to explore!

Although the Northwest is known for being "evergreen," nearly [three-quarters of the 80 species of trees](#) native to Washington, Oregon and Idaho are deciduous (i.e., trees that seasonally drop their leaves). Leaf loss is an evolutionary adaptation to a harsh seasonal environment, such as severe drought or cold, and it provides an impressive display of color throughout the region.

**Distance:** Varies

**Time:** Varies

**Caveats:** mid-September through mid-November

An increasingly shorter period of daylight triggers leaf loss. In many species, a flush of brilliant color floods the leaf, prior to falling, as its life-giving nutrients cease flowing and the photosynthesis process terminates.

Fall colors first appear in the Northwest in mid- to late September and some species continue their displays through October. In the milder climate west of the Cascades, colorful displays may linger into early and mid-November.

Generally, species in the colder climate areas east of the mountains and at higher elevations color and drop first. Also, trees in the northern parts of the region tend to change color before those in more southerly latitudes (there's a spread of seven degrees of latitude between Bellingham and Medford).

## Fall Foliage Regions

These popular drives showcase regional fall foliage throughout Washington, Oregon, and northern Idaho:

- [Cascades](#)
- [Eastern Washington](#)
- [Northeast Oregon](#)
- [Northern Idaho](#)
- [Olympic Peninsula of Washington](#)
- [Oregon Coastal Range](#)

- . [Puget Sound Lowlands](#)
- . [Willamette Valley of Oregon](#)

## **Cascades**

Presented from north to south

### **Mount Baker Highway (WA SR-542) - Bellingham to Mount Baker**

Rises from lush lowland woodlands with bigleaf maple, cottonwood and alder, through evergreen forests with admixture of maples.

Look for scarlets in avalanche chutes on higher slopes.

### **North Cascades Highway (WA SR-20) - Burlington to Okanogan/Omak**

Crosses from humid western Washington to semi-arid region east of Cascades.

Dogwood, vine maple and alder are prevalent in the lowland forests west of crest. Groves of alpine larch occupy the heights east of Washington Pass. In the Methow Valley (Mazama-Winthrop-Twisp) look for quaking aspen and cottonwood.

### **Stevens Pass Highway (US-2) - Monroe to Wenatchee**

Lush Skykomish Valley forests of dogwood, maple and alder contrast with dark green conifers.

Look for scarlets in avalanche chutes west of the summit. East of the pass you'll see magnificent stands of quaking aspen and the Tumwater Canyon area (between Winton and Leavenworth) is resplendent with golds of cottonwood and aspen and bright reds of maple.

### **Snoqualmie Pass (I-90) - North Bend to Ellensburg**

West of the pass look for alder, bigleaf maple and vine maple; on the east side you'll see western larch and groves of black cottonwood and quaking aspen along the upper Yakima River.

### **Blewett Pass Highway (US-97) - Peshastin to Ellensburg**

Cottonwood, larch and aspen.

### **Chinook Pass (WA SR-410) - Enumclaw to Naches**

Typical westside colors from cottonwoods, maples, ash and alders. East of the summit look for maples, western larch, aspen and cottonwood. At lower elevations along the Naches River you'll see Oregon white oak.

### **White Pass (US-12) - Chehalis to Yakima**

see above description for **Chinook Pass**.

### **Columbia Gorge (WA SR-14 and I-84 on the Oregon side) - Portland/Vancouver to The Dalles**

View the change in vegetation from the humid forests of the west to the semi-

arid, open woods and grasslands east of Hood River from these water-level routes through the Cascades. Huge maples, oaks, cottonwood, ash and alder dominate the mixed forests of the west. Oaks and cottonwoods are prevalent in the drier east. For a scenic alternative try the Historic Columbia Gorge Scenic Highway between Troutdale and Dodson, and east of Mosier via the famous Rowena Loops.

**Skamania County Byways - Carson to Cougar)**

Follow Wind River Road (FR-30) from Carson north to FR-51, then north on FR-51 to FR-90, then west on FR-90

**Mount Hood Loop (US-26, OR SR-35 and I-84) - Portland, Timberline, Hood River, Troutdale**

This easy day trip from Portland/Vancouver, including a drive up to Timberline on Mount Hood, covers the full range of mid-latitude life zones from humid, lowland forest to sub-alpine. The Hood River Valley orchard country is a delight in fall.

**Mckenzie River Highway (OR SR-126) - Eugene to Redmond**

Colorful displays of cottonwood, oak, maple, ash and alder; striking groves of quaking aspen in Sisters area.

**Klamath Basin (US-97, OR SR-66, SR-62, SR-140)**

Groves of cottonwood and aspen are ablaze with color along roads ringing Upper Klamath Lake and in the southern Oregon Cascades.

**Eastern Washington**

**North Cross-State Highway (WA SR-20) - Tonasket to Newport**

Highway 20 leads east from Tonasket across the Kettle River Range through some scenic fall color country. Routes leading north from Spokane (including US-395, US-2 and WA SR-206) and into northeast Washington's Selkirk Mountains pass forests of black cottonwood and western paper birch; in the highlands look for western larch and quaking aspen.

**Northeastern Oregon**

**Wallowas**

Oregon SR-82 from La Grande to Wallowa Lake provides view of the snow-clad Wallowa Mountains, framed by blazing cottonwoods. In the higher country look for aspen, birch and larch. The side road leading into the Lostine River Canyon is particularly scenic. At Mount Howard a gondola lift transports visitors up to the 8,200-foot level where fall colors start early and the panoramic views are spectacular (lift operates through Sept., weather permitting. FR-39 continues south from the Joseph area, around the eastern flank of the Wallowas, to SR-86

near Halfway; continue west on SR-86 to Baker City.

### **Blue Mountains**

Routes through the Blues, including I-84 (Pendleton to Baker City), SR-204, SR-224, SR-220, SR-7, US-395 (Pendleton to Burns) and US-26 (Prineville to Vale) pass some colorful stands. US-26 paralleling the upper John Day River has some nice groves of cottonwood, birch and aspen (Dayville to Eldorado Pass).

### **Northern Idaho**

#### **Lake Coeur D'Alene - Plummer to Coeur d'Alene**

Follow ID SR-5 from Plummer east through Heyburn State Park to St. Maries, the north on SR-3 and SR-97 along the scenic east shore of Lake Coeur d'Alene. Colors are good from mid-September into mid-October.

#### **Priest River and Lake**

Spectacular color from mid-September through mid-October (mostly cottonwood and birch) from Priest River north to Priest Lake on ID SR-57.

### **Olympic Peninsula**

#### **Olympic Loop (US-101, US-12 and WA SR-8)**

Groves of maple, alder and cottonwood. Bigleaf maple is the dominant deciduous species in the rainforest habitat on the Olympic's western slopes and valleys -- follow the Hoh River Road east from US-101.

### **Oregon Coast & Coast Ranges**

#### **Oregon Coast Highway (US-101) - Astoria to Brookings**

Early Autumn is normally the best season to visit the Oregon coast (fewer crowds, less fog and sunnier weather). Red alder, cottonwoods, bigleaf maple, Pacific dogwood and Oregon ash provide the most color. See the OREGON COAST-NORTH, CENTRAL & SOUTH AUTO TOURS

#### **Sunset Highway (US-26)**

Leads west from the Tualatin Valley across the northern Coast Range into Seaside, passing groves of maple, alder, ash and cottonwood.

#### **Wilson River Highway (OR SR-6)**

Between the Tualatin Valley and Tillamook you'll pass through the Tillamook Burn, a broadleaf forest (largely bigleaf maple and red alder) re-established in a vast area of Oregon's northern Coast Range devastated by wildfires in the 1930s.

### **Puget Sound Lowlands**

Almost any road in Puget Sound country leads through areas of mixed forest typical of the region. Look for bigleaf maple, black cottonwood and red alder

growing throughout the region. In Whatcom County you'll see groves of paper birch, while southward from Seattle, Oregon ash is more common. South from Tacoma, Oregon white oak occurs (Lakewood to Fort Lewis). In more densely wooded areas you'll spot vine maple and the beautiful Pacific dogwood.

**Chuckanut Drive (WA SR-11) - Burlington to Bellingham**

Highway 11 leads north from Burlington, traversing fertile farming country. It winds along the precipitous edge of Chackanut Mountain, overlooking Samish and Bellingham bays. Maple and alder provides most of the fall colors. See the MUKILTEO-BELLINGHAM AUTO TOUR.

**Whatcom County Drives**

Groves of western paper birch are common on the rolling plains of northwestern Whatcom County. Their white bark and bright yellow fall colors contrast strikingly with the greens of farmland, coniferous forest and views of snowcapped Mount Baker. Follow SR-539 north from Bellingham to Lynden, then take the Lynden-Birch Bay Road west to Birch Bay. Then follow Bay Road east to Pleasant Valley junction and take Kickerville Road south, returning to I-5 at Ferndale. Along this route you'll also see cottonwood, alder, dogwood and maple. Near Birch Bay look for the scarlet of Douglas maple.

**Whidbey Island (WA SR-525 and SR-20)**

Follow the island's trunk highway from Columbia Beach to Deception Pass through farmland and groves of maple, dogwood and alder.

**Warm Beach-Stanwood-Conway-La Conner**

Take I-5 exit 199 at Marysville and go west through the Tulalip Indian Reservation, through Warm Beach to Stanwood. Follow Pioneer Highway north to Conway, then head west across Fir Island to La Conner. This itinerary traverses a variety of farm and woodland. See the MUKILTEO-BELLINGHAM AUTO TOUR.

**Highway 9 (WA SR-9) - Woodinville to Sumas**

Parallels I-5, but on a route 5 to 15 miles to the east of the interstate. Highway 9 passes through the fertile valleys of the Snohomish, Stillaguamish, Skagit and Nooksack rivers on the edge of the wooded Cascade foothills -- a wide variety of fall foliage.

**Seattle**

The Seattle metropolitan region includes a mixed forest of conifers and broadleaf trees. Among native species good for fall colors are bigleaf maple, Pacific dogwood, black cottonwood and red alder. WASHINGTON PARK (UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON ARBORETUM) is a conservancy and research unit jointly operated by the city and university, under management of the latter. It contains

an extensive collection of both native and exotic trees and shrubs. The color season starts the last two weeks in September, reaches its peak in mid- to late October, and tapers off into mid-November.

**Maple Valley Highway (WA SR-169) - Renton to Enumclaw**

Head southbound on this route for good fall colors and view of Mount Rainier.  
**Willamette Valley**

The Willamette Valley's major north-south highways -- I-5, SR-99E and SR-99W - - give motorists a good, overall sample of the region's diversity. Take side roads for a more intimate view, especially into the foothills where country schools, barns, covered bridges and small villages are reminiscent of New England. On the valley floor watch for Oregon white oak and bigleaf maple on the open farmlands and forest margins. Black cottonwood and Oregon ash thrive along stream courses. In the wooded foothills you'll see maples, alder, ash and occasionally dogwood.

**Sandy To Molalla (OR SR-211)**

A peaceful drive through foothill woods and farms.

**Woodburn-Silver Falls-Salem (OR SR-214)**

Leads across valley farmland, through picturesque Mount Angel and Silverton, then traverses the Cascade foothills through Silver Falls State Park (with trails and a dozen waterfalls); head west toward Salem via Shaw through the scenic Waldo Hills with its open farm and woodlands.

**Albany-Lyons (US-20, Or SR-226)**

Valley farms and wooded foothills; several covered bridges.

**Brownsville-Springfield (OR SR-228 And County Roads)**

Attractive rural scenery includes small towns in Calapooia and Mohawk valleys; covered bridges.

**Rickreall-Kings Valley (OR SR-223)**

Traverses foothills and pocket vales along western edge of Willamette Valley.

**Territorial Highway**

Follows paved county roads from Monroe south to Cottage Grove (via Cheshire, Elmira, Crow and Loraine) through interesting southwest corner of Willamette Valley.

**Willamette River Roads**

For river-close routes passing giant maples and cottonwood try: **Newberg to Salem** (SR-219 & French Prairie Road); **Dayton to Salem** (OR SR-221); **Salem to Independence** (OR SR-51); **Corvallis to Harrisburg** (via SR-34 and Peoria along east bank of Willamette).

## Portland Area

The Tualatin Mountains that form Portland's western horizon support a mixed forest cover including bigleaf maple, red alder and Oregon ash. You'll see brilliant foliage during October into early November in **Forest Park**, **Macleay Park**, **Washington Park** and the **Hoyt Arboretum**. There are over 50 miles of trails, including the famous "Wildwood Trail" (14.5 miles long). NW Lief Erickson Drive and NW Skyline Drive provide auto access to the area.

Other interesting fall foliage drives and hikes in the metropolitan area include:

**Sauvie Island:** A large island at the confluence of the Willamette and Columbia rivers, just northwest of the city. Flat terrain makes it great for biking.

**Kelley Point Park:** Where the mainstream of the Willamette empties into the Columbia; accessible through wooded lake and bayou landscapes complete with black cottonwood and Oregon ash, common on river bottom land.

**Tryon Creek State Park:** This 600-acre wilderness conservancy within the urban area in southwest Portland, between SW Boones Ferry Road and SW Terwilliger Blvd, is only 8 mile for the downtown core. It offers habitat for beaver.

## Native Northwest Trees Noted for Fall Colors

Table ordered by species

Tree Species (scientific name) tree size	Fall Leaf Color (usual color period)	Habitat Distribution
<b>Alder - Red</b> ( <i>Alnus rubra</i> , Bong.) 30' to 130'	Yellow (mid- to late October)	Throughout WA and OR west of Cascades below 3000', especially on moist bottomlands, along streams and in burns or clearcuts.
<b>Ash - Oregon</b> ( <i>Fraxinus oregana</i> , Nutt.) 60' to 80'	Yellow (early autumn)	Common along streams & in moist lowland valleys west of Cascades from Grays Harbor and southern Puget Sound south through western Oregon.
<b>Aspen - Quaking</b> ( <i>Populus tremuloides</i> , Michx.) 10' to 60'	Brilliant Gold occasionally REDDISH (Sept. in colder areas, otherwise October)	Native to colder mountain areas; common at edge of coniferous forest, along streams & in meadows east of Cascades. Most common in North Cascades & northeast WA, spotty in Wallowas and Blue Mountains.
<b>Birch - Western Paper</b> ( <i>Betula papyrifera</i> , Marsh; var. <i>occidentalis</i> , Sarg.) 40' to 100'	Bright Yellow (mid- to late October; mid-Sept in colder areas)	Common on moist soils & along streams of northern Puget Sound (esp. Whatcom County) & in wetter canyons of northwest WA & in Blue Mountains.
<b>Cottonwood - Black</b> (Wn. Balsam Poplar) <i>Populus trichocarpa</i> , Torr. & Gray) -	Golden (October; starts mid-Sept. in colder areas)	Widespread throughout Northwest favoring moist, riverbottom soils. Common along streams both west and east of Cascades. This is the region's largest native hardwoods.

80' to 120'		
<b>Dogwood - Pacific</b> (Mountain Dogwood) ( <i>Cornus nuttallii</i> , Audubon) 30' to 50'	Yellow (mid- to late October)	Common lowland forest tree west of Cascades. It frequently flowers for a second time during late summer (August into September).
<b>Larch - Alpine</b> (Subalpine Larch) ( <i>Larix lyallii</i> , Parl.) 25' to 60'	Bright Yellow (September into October)	A highland tree, often twisted & stunted when growing near timberline. Found in Chelan & Okanogan counties & on Mount Hood. One of two deciduous conifers native to region.
<b>Larch - Western</b> (Tamarack) ( <i>Larix</i> <i>occidentalis</i> , Nutt.) 100' to 200'	Brilliant Yellow (September into October)	Needleleaf deciduous conifer common in northeast WA, and on Ochocos, Blues & Wallowas of northeast OR. Also found on higher slopes east of Cascades from southern Chelan County south into Deschutes County.
<b>Maple - Bigleaf</b> (Oregon Maple) ( <i>Acer</i> <i>macrophyllum</i> , Porsh.) 60' to 100'	Yellow, occasionally reddish (through October into early November)	Native to lowland, mixed forests throughout western WA & OR. Common in rainforests of Olympic Peninsula; grows best on moist bottomland soils.
<b>Maple - Douglas</b> ( <i>Acer</i> <i>glabrum</i> , var. <i>douglasii</i> ) 10' to 40'	Yellow (October)	Not common west of Cascades, but found scattered on open, rocky areas of Puget Sound (good stands near Birch Bay); more prevalent in brushfields east of Cascades where it is a favorite browse of muledeer & elk.
<b>Maple - Vine</b> ( <i>Acer</i> <i>circinatum</i> , Pursh.) 5' to 35'	Scarlet, Orange (October)	Delicate, rambling shrublike tree forming understory in the coniferous & mixed forests west of Cascades. Spectacular displays along cross-state highways & in clearcuts, burns & avalanche chutes.
<b>Oak - Oregon White</b> ( <i>Quercus garryana</i> , Dougl.) 35' to 70'	Reddish-Orange- Brown (October)	Common in lowland forests & open woodlands from southern Puget Sound through Willamette, Umpqua & Rogue valleys. Also grows in Columbia Gorge & along streams in Wasco, Yakima & Klickitat counties.