**Showcasing the DNR: Get outside and celebrate the glory of Michigan’s fall color**

**By KATHLEEN LAVEY**

**Michigan Department of Natural Resources**

There is only one thing to do as Michigan’s air grows crisp, temperatures fall and trees turn from green to glorious shades of yellow, orange and red: revel in it.

Michigan’s 19.3 million acres of forest land are ready to put on their annual show for leaf peepers, beginning now in the Upper Peninsula and spreading southward through October.

Enjoying fall color may be the perfect pastime for 2020, given the coronavirus pandemic. Take an outdoor hike or climb on bikes and hit the trails with appropriate social distancing, or just stay in the bubble of your own vehicle as you enjoy fall color from a drive along winding country roads.

“Fall color season is an incredible time to enjoy what Michigan’s forests have to offer,” said Jeff Stampfly, acting chief of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources’ Forest Resources Division, which manages 4 million acres of state forest lands. “From U.P. waterfalls to the forests of the northern Lower Peninsula, there’s something everyone can enjoy.”

Leaf colors vary by tree species – for example, oaks turn red or brown, aspen turn golden yellow and dogwood, purplish red. Maples turn scarlet, orange-red or yellow, depending on species.

Here are some fall color possibilities, starting in the northwest corner of the U.P. and moving south through the state. Check out the [DNR’s fall color map](https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/65e593a6c8ed44b2933f9f1ad7c929e1) to help plan your viewing.

**Hit the Porkies:** [Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park](https://www2.dnr.state.mi.us/parksandtrails/Details.aspx?id=426&type=SPRK) in Ontonagon and Gogebic counties is 60,000 acres of forest that includes a backdrop of old-growth hemlock trees. The spectacular Lake of the Clouds is nestled among color-covered hills and includes an accessible viewing area. The park’s visitor center off South Boundary Road near the County Road 107 intersection, is open with reduced hours this season. It offers exhibits and programs that tell the story of the U.P.’s forests and mountains. Off-road vehicle enthusiasts will surely enjoy the Bill Nichols Trail, which features triple trestles over the Ontonagon River.

**The Keweenaw is cool:** You’ll see plenty of fall color just getting to the Keweenaw Peninsula, Michigan’s northernmost tip. Learn some history while you’re at it with a visit to [Fort Wilkins Historic State Park.](https://www.michigan.gov/mhc/0%2C9075%2C7-361-85147_87261---%2C00.html) Catch great views from Brockway Mountain Drive or trek to your choice of lighthouses with fall color as a backdrop.

**Watch for waterfalls:** Waterfalls are also popular spots for catching fall color in the western U.P, including the Presque Isle River falls – there are three separate waterfalls in a close series – in the Porkies, where old-growth maple trees provide plenty of color. Visitors also can check out [Bond Falls](https://www2.dnr.state.mi.us/parksandtrails/Details.aspx?id=412&type=SPRK)and [Agate Falls](https://www2.dnr.state.mi.us/parksandtrails/Details.aspx?id=413&type=SPRK) state scenic sites. Bond Falls includes an accessible boardwalk with six viewing locations. Below the Mackinac Bridge, [Ocqueoc Falls](https://www2.dnr.state.mi.us/parksandtrails/Details.aspx?id=51&type=SFPW) in the northern Lower Peninsula has an accessible trail and viewing deck.

And then, of course, there is the big kahuna of Michigan waterfalls, [Tahquamenon Falls](https://www2.dnr.state.mi.us/ParksandTrails/Details.aspx?id=428&type=SPRK) north of Newberry. Two sets of falls are the centerpiece of a 48,000-acre park that offers 40 miles of hiking trails, including a portion of the famed North Country National Scenic Trail, 13 inland lakes and 24 miles of the Tahquamenon River. The Upper Falls is the largest waterfall east of the Mississippi at 200 feet across with a 50-foot drop. The tea-colored water that flows over the falls is the result of tannins leached from cedar swamps.

**Pigeon River Country:** The [Pigeon River Country State Forest](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0%2C4570%2C7-350-79133_79204_93902---%2C00.html) covers more than 107,000 acres in the northeastern Lower Peninsula and is home to Michigan’s elk herd. The century-old forest offers stunning fall color opportunities, fishing, camping and hiking. Visitors need to be aware that the area is managed to maintain the wilderness feel that Ernest Hemingway glowingly described a century ago, and cell phone maps don’t always work.

**Hartwick Pines:** Majestic white pines help create a stunning backdrop for fall color at [Hartwick Pines State Park](https://www2.dnr.state.mi.us/parksandtrails/Details.aspx?id=453&type=SPRK). The 9,672-acre park overlooks the AuSable River’s East Branch, includes four small lakes with evocative names like Bright and Glory and rolling hills clad in orange, yellow and russet tones. A visitors’ center and old-time logging camp help tell the story of Michigan’s rich forest history for park guests.

**Ludington area:** [Ludington State Park](https://www2.dnr.state.mi.us/parksandtrails/Details.aspx?id=468&type=SPRK) includes more than 18 miles of trails, a canoe trail, Lake Michigan shoreline, the Big Sable River and inland Hamlin Lake, all packed onto 5,300 forested acres. Hike, paddle and camp your way into fall colors.

**Metro Detroit area:** Fall color in the city? Absolutely. In fact, the city of Detroit is home to a rare type of forest at [Belle Isle State Park](https://www2.dnr.state.mi.us/parksandtrails/Details.aspx?type=SPRK&id=736). The 200-acre forest covers 20 percent of the island and includes rare Shumard oak trees, as well as a variety of other hardwoods. The forest thrives on a proper balance of water and efforts are underway to protect and restore it. Several state parks in the three-county area that makes up metropolitan Detroit also include the 4,600-acre [Bald Mountain Recreation Area](https://www2.dnr.state.mi.us/parksandtrails/Details.aspx?id=435&type=SPRK) headquartered at Oakland County’s Lake Orion. It has 15 miles of hiking and biking trails and more rugged terrain than the rest of southeast Michigan.

**Get out and camp:** State parks, recreation areas and state forest campgrounds offer a variety of fall camping experiences, from modern and rustic campsites for tents, recreational vehicles and popup campers to lodging in the camper cabins, yurts, cottages and lodges available in some state parks. Fall camping offers some unique advantages, including the fact that reservations at popular locations are easier to find. To check availability or make a camping reservation, visit [MiDNRReservations.com](https://gcc01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.midnrreservations.com%2F&data=02%7C01%7CLaveyK%40michigan.gov%7Ce36db74b51c249b2226a08d84dbaa7ac%7Cd5fb7087377742ad966a892ef47225d1%7C0%7C0%7C637344811353476449&sdata=w%2Fs4Hx%2F3U0Ctpin5hjtqbo%2BD7XX2XSLFCHP22qUg9To%3D&reserved=0)
or call 1-800-44PARKS (1-800-447-2757).

**Hit the trail:** Fall is the perfect time to take advantage of the state’s abundant trail opportunities – there are miles of good reasons Michigan is known as “The Trails State” – from biking and hiking to equestrian and ORV trails. Michigan has more than 12,500 miles of state-designated trails that touch every corner of the state. [Michigan Trails Week](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0%2C4570%2C7-350-79133_79206_83612---%2C00.html#:~:text=Michigan%20Trails%20Week%2C%20Sept.%2020,federally%20managed%20trails%20and%20pathways.) is Sept. 20-27 this year, and you can join a challenge to earn badges for walking, biking or riding. Explore Michigan trail options at [Michigan.gov/DNRTrails](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0%2C4570%2C7-350-79133_79206---%2C00.html).

Wherever you are in the Great Lakes State, get outside and enjoy all the magic and wonder that autumn has to offer. It’s all there waiting for you.

Check out previous Showcasing the DNR stories in our archive at [Michigan.gov/DNRStories](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0%2C4570%2C7-350-79137_79770_79873_80003---%2C00.html). To subscribe to upcoming Showcasing articles, sign up for free email delivery at [Michigan.gov/DNR](http://www.Michigan.gov/DNR).

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