Time to sneak a peek at fall color

BY JESSICA SIBLEY
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PICKENS — It's here again. Fall.

The perfect time to get in the car and drive up the mountains or simply around town to view nature's personal kaleidoscope of color.

Foliage is a free show to an environment full of vibrant hues, and local enthusiasts are expecting another great year of color.

Curtis Stuks, assistant manager of Table Rock State Park on Highway 11, said everything is lining up for a spectacular viewing season.

"We are looking at the next two to three weeks as our peak time for color," he said. "Now, there is lots of bright green."

He added that this transformation is attributed to mild autumn days coupled with cool, crisp — but not freezing — evenings.

During the months of September, October and November the once green leaves of spring and summer alter their appearance for good, before falling to the ground.

Altogether, temperature, precipitation and wind will greatly impact fall foliage.

"Ideally, the best foliage happens when autumn days are mild and the evenings are cool and crisp, but stay above

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A maple tree shows its fall colors. A vast network of county foresters, volunteers and others contribute their observations to state tourism officials, who in turn work up "foliage forecasts" published online and elsewhere to let leaf-peepers know where to find the best fall foliage.

COLOR: Set to explode

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32 degrees. However, if daytime temperatures are too warm for a good period of time in the fall, the colors may be less brilliant," said Pete Fallon, Clemson foliage enthusiast.

"The foliage season may also last one to two weeks longer. When it comes to frost, that will inhibit the production of anthocyanin, a pigment producing various shades of red. This is why having temperatures above freezing is exactly what we should be hoping for."

Annual precipitation, which provides moisture for soil and plant life, also plays a role in the Upstate's fall foliage Fallon added.

"A late spring, which delays the release of moisture through snow melt, may push back the color change by a nearly a week, sometimes longer in extreme cases. Severe drought often causes the leaves of distressed or young trees to drop their leaves early too. This year, we've been pretty lucky with it all."

Except for maybe one thing, Stuks said.

"The wind storms we've had roll through here have taken a lot of leaves off of our trees already," he said. "We aren't too worried, but wind can definitely put a damper on fall foliage if it keeps up."

Currently, Stuks said the sourwoods, like cottonwoods, are already starting to change while the Maple trees won't be far behind.

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