

Time to bid another summer . farewell

From Labor Day to the beginning of school to the first falling leaves, the signs of season's change are among us

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Summer, we're told, ends unofficially on Labor Day, officially on the fall equinox (Sept. 22) and psychologically on the night before school starts.

Americans don't agree on summer any more than they agree on politics. But summer's a state of mind, and you don't need a calendar to know when it's over.

Summer's over when you unpack the beach bag and find the coconut oil has solidified. It's over when you take the boat out of the water and still pray for Indian summer. It's over the first time you leave the top up when the sun's out. The first time you're once again stuck behind a school bus.

You know summer's over when the first leaf falls and the harvest moon rises, when the mosquitoes stop biting and the dogwood turns red.

Summer's over when they let the dogs jump into the community pool — an event known as "Soggy Dog Day" at the Aquatic Center in York, Neb.

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Summer's over, says Kristen Lee, when her three college student kids have gone to school and she changes the bed sheets, putting on cozy flannel ones for their return at Thanksgiving.

You can see the end of summer: Geese in chevron flight. Copperheads sunning on the rocks. Snow on the peaks. The first warbler.

You can hear the end of summer from the high school football field — the grunts and whistles of pre-season practice, the wobbly notes of the marching band drilling into form.

And you hear it in the silence: no ice cream truck jingle, no life guard's whistle, no cicada's song.

You can even taste the end of summer — pumpkin coffee,



MARK LENNIHAN, AP

Sundown attracts beachgoers in August at Brooklyn's Coney Island in New York.



KELSEY KREMER, DES MOINES REGISTER

Crowds walk along the carnival rides in the grand concourse at the Iowa State Fair in August in Des Moines.

pumpkin Oreos, pumpkin vodka and pumpkin beer.

Summer's going when Home Depot's garden department has an Alpine Garden Gnome holding a "mushroom statue" marked down to \$18.69 from \$20.54. It's gone when the floral hanging baskets come down from the custom metal supports on the light poles at the shopping center in Walterville, Ore.

For some of those old enough to remember 16 summers ago, Sept. 11 will always mark the end of the season, and so much else.

But summer's not really over until the last cricket chirps, the last tomato is picked and the last weed is pulled. It's not over until the last race at Saratoga. Not until the final out — even if it comes in

the World Series in November.

On the Gulf Coast, the end of hurricane season — Nov. 30 — is more important than the end of summer, as Harvey has made all too clear.

Summer ends in Madison, Wis., whenever Lake Vista Café on Lake Monona closes until spring. It's over in Scituate, Mass., when the Coast Guard station shuts down. This year it's over Sept. 3 in Rehoboth, Del., when the Beach Bandstand ends its 54th season with a performance by the Delaware State Approaching Storm Marching Band.

In Grass Valley, Calif., summer's end is marked by the first rain of September. In Jackson Hole, Wyo., it's the stream of pickups filled with firewood rolling down into town.

At Lincoln Center, in New York City, it's Opening Night at the Metropolitan Opera. The elaborately attired cast and elegantly dressed audience sings *The Star-Spangled Banner*, with the sopranos hitting the high F at "red glare." Then everyone gives themselves a big hand.

Summer's over in the Coachella Valley of southern California when the daily high doesn't top

100 degrees and the first white crowned sparrows appear. It's over in the Willamette Valley of Oregon when the black-eyed-susans lose their petals and the basil turns to black slush.

There are people for whom summer always ends early: school administrators, nurses and teachers, whose work begins before the first day of class. Their summer has the rhythm of a weekend. June is a month of Fridays, July is a month of Saturdays, August a month of Sundays.

Whenever and wherever it occurs, summer's end can come as a relief.

It inspires the retired English teacher Maggie Miles to verse: "The end of summer means stripping the guest room bed after hosting 12 guests in three weeks/ and not putting on clean sheets."

For many of us, it's gotten harder to know when summer ends. Some of the old signposts are useless.

People never used to wear white or wear shorts after Labor Day. Now they wear both year round. Another end-of-season marker was the end of summer reruns and the arrival of the TV Guide "Fall Preview" (a fixture since the magazine's founding in 1953) with the lineup of new shows. Now first-run shows and reruns are chronologically interchangeable.

Some signposts have moved forward. The college football season already has kicked off with five games last Saturday, including one (Stanford vs. Rice) played in Sydney, where it's actually winter.

Other signposts have moved back. Once, the change in a vacation area after the tourists left was dramatic and melancholy.

But now the tourists never really leave. The commercially-inspired "shoulder season," with its discounts and festivals has helped to blur the once-distinct summer terminus.

So the last word goes to Jillian Anderson, a native Ohioan who now works in the concrete jungle of Manhattan and lives in leafy Brooklyn.

"Summer is over," she says, "when I say it's over."