

Fall Colors in Florida – Yes, We Have Some

(You Just Have to Look a Bit Harder)

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I've only lived in Citrus County for 3 ½ years but I have learned that a good percentage of residents are from places such as Massachusetts, New York, and Michigan. I am originally from western New York (Buffalo) so I feel your pain when it comes to the lack of vibrant fall foliage in October. However, although more subtle, Florida does offer some fall coloration if you know where to look. Below are some places and plants/trees that can provide a glimpse of what we came to get used to in the northern and northeastern states. This list is based on some research of fall foliage in Florida; I cannot claim to be familiar with many of these places. The trees, however, I can vouch for!

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Red Maple – This is probably the most vivid tree in Florida and turns a bright red in late October and November. Remember that our fall is much warmer than in northern climates and the trees often do not change color until late fall. Red maples are most common near wet areas such as along pond edges and large groups of them growing together are quite vivid when they turn color. Red maples are indigenous to all 67 Florida Counties. We are fortunate to have

thickets of them scattered throughout Citrus, Sumter, and Marion Counties.

Sweetgum and Pignut Hickory – Sweetgum is another common hardwood in our area. It turns a bright yellow and often stands out against its green neighbors. It is a common component of our hardwood forests but can often be found as individuals within pine and oak forests. Pignut hickory is found on drier hardwood sites, often mixed with oaks, and also turns a bright yellow.

Beautyberry – This native shrub is found in our forests throughout the area and provide us with clusters of bright purple berries which are great food for deer and birds.



Photo courtesy of Tampa Bay Times

American Beautyberry displaying fall purple berries.

Black-cherry – This tree is also a common component of our hardwood forests in this area and provide a bright red and yellow in late fall.

Virginia creeper – This five-leafed vine is often found growing up tree trunks in our yards and forests. The leaves turn a bright red and purple in late fall and provide a backdrop against the trunks and leaves of their “hosts”.

Where to Go – We are blessed with many natural areas which are open to the public. These include the Withlacoochee State Forest, Ft. Cooper State Park, Goethe State Forest, Rainbow Springs State Park, the Cross Florida Greenway, Half Moon WMA (Wildlife Management Area), Ocala National Forest, Suwannee River State Park, Fanning Springs State Park, Potts Preserve, Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge, Flying Eagle Preserve, and Crystal River State Park. And this list is not inclusive.



Perhaps the best places to see red maples locally are Potts Preserve at the end of Turner Camp Road north of Inverness and the Flying Eagle Preserve at the end of Eden Parkway east of Inverness. Both of these

properties are along either the Withlacoochee River (Potts) or Lake Tsala-Apopka (Flying Eagle) where lower wetland-type hardwoods are dominant. However, other fall colored hardwoods should also be present to include sweetgum and sugarberry (not mentioned above). The Richloam Tract of the Withlacoochee State Forest in Sumter County along CR 471 and the Croom Tract of the Withlacoochee State Forest along Hwy. 50 east of Brooksville also offer a variety of hardwood forests and wetlands. And, of course, the Withlacoochee State Trail is a great way to enjoy some fall foliage from a bicycle or on foot. The new Dunnellon Trail north of CR 39 (off US 41 just south of Dunnellon) winds its way through hardwood forests and over the Withlacoochee River.

Some other areas which are recommended for foliage seeking visitors include the following:

Alexander Springs in Ocala National Forest - offers a clear pool of water surrounded by red maple and sweetgum

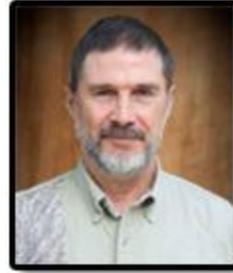
Torrey State Park in the Panhandle west of Tallahassee – 150 foot high bluffs over the Apalachicola River where hardwood forests are full of sugar maple, sweetgum, and sourwood trees. The latter is a less common hardwood tree (at least in our area) and offers red and yellow fall foliage.

Ormond Scenic Loop and Trail – This 30 mile trail starts north of Daytona Beach and stretches along the beach and the Halifax River. Color is provided by red maple and pignut hickory trees scattered amongst canopies of live oaks. The loop goes

through four state parks and the river lagoon is home to manatees and dolphins. Only in Florida could you enjoy such a combination of color and wildlife!



While Florida's fall foliage is no match for New England or the mountains of North Carolina, our unique ecosystems and wildlife provide a different experience for the "leaf-peepers" who choose to enjoy our local natural areas.



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