

Magnificent Autumn by Lisa Miller



Yellow Aspen in Flagstaff's Southside neighborhood
Photo credit: Lisa Miller

Autumn is without a doubt my favorite season, although that hasn't always been the case. As a kid, I loved Summer the most, when school was out and I could play all day. (Maybe that's true for all of us?) In recent years, vibrant colors & cooler temperatures have started having a stronger pull on me.

As the sun becomes less intense, allowing for cooler temperatures, the time is perfect for hiking, kayaking, climbing, horseback riding, and other outdoor activities. The earth presently showcases a variety of vividly-colored mushrooms, and gourds of various hues decorate the produce sections of local markets. The kids are back in school, and thoughts will soon turn toward planning for the holidays, prompting memories of years past. And the leaves, oh the leaves!

The US Forest Service explains the breathtaking beauty exhibited by many broadleaf trees at this time. All through the year, their leaves have several pigments present. During warmer months, chlorophyll is dominant, causing them to appear green. But as days grow shorter in the Fall, other pigments become prominent, resulting in amazing palettes of yellow, gold, orange, and many shades of red. It is during this glorious time that a wall of tissue is formed beneath each leaf, stopping the flow of fluids, causing them to eventually drop. Around the Flagstaff

area, these beauties are always seen on the ground much too early, an unhappy consequence of frequent high winds, driving rains, and falling graupel.

Prior to the 16th century, this season was called *Harvest*. But as more and more people moved away from the countryside and into towns, the term gradually lost its reference to the time of year and came to refer to the actual activity of reaping. Afterwards, the season became known as *Fall*, referring to the fall of the leaves, or *Autumn*, which may have derived from a Latin word meaning *increase*.

You may be surprised to learn that now is a good time to plant new trees. Planting in the Fall gives them extra time to establish their roots before the onset of Summer's intense heat and drought. The cooler temperatures and moisture we receive in Fall and Winter make it easier for the trees to adjust. There is no need to fear the effects of snow, ice, or freezing temperatures on your saplings, because they, like bears and bats, sleep during the colder months.

According to Ayurveda (meaning "science of life"), the planet's oldest recorded medical system still used in India, the seasonal changes that happen in Nature also occur in the human body. Much like trees pulling in energy from their leaves, resulting in coloring & eventual falling, the human body pulls in energy, which can result in dry skin, painful joints, bowel distress, and ringing in the ear. Moisturizing from both the outside (with topical essential oils or lotions) and inside (by hydrating with plenty of healthy fluids) is recommended to help with these maladies.

During this cool, dry season, Ayurveda also teaches that our bodies benefit from avoiding most raw foods and eating heavier, sweeter, cooked whole foods, like warming soups, stewed fruit, and stuffed veggies. Locally grown fruits and vegetables are always best (and the ones grown in your garden are the pinnacle.) This is due to the earth's seasonal introduction of new regional microbes that help our gut's existing environment transition to new conditions, thereby supporting immunity and other functions. Nature provides us with exactly what we need, at the precise time we need it.

I hope the gentle months of this extraordinary time of year bring your family great delight. Among the cooler days, the lovely leaves, and the holiday plan-making, may the season bless you with beautiful new experiences and joyful memories.

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