

## 6 free places to see gorgeous fall colors near peak in Atlanta area

Recreation

By Helena Oliviero - The Atlanta Journal-Constitution



Photo of the campus of Berry College taken by student photographer Shannon Bostic.

Posted: 5:08 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 1, 2016

There is still time to see dramatic fall colors taking place in Georgia. In fact, much of the state is only now beginning to shift from shades of green to rich autumn hues — yellow, orange, crimson red.

Unseasonably warm weather and a lack of rain have pushed back the state's leaf season.

Traditionally, some of the most popular spots for leaf-watching include Amicalola Falls, Black Rock Mountain and Unicoi State Park. But some other lesser-known sites along with some inside metro Atlanta are also worth exploring.

To help leaf peepers find the best scenery, Georgia's State Parks offers an online "Leaf Watch" travel planner, found at [www.GeorgiaStateParks.org/leafwatch](http://www.GeorgiaStateParks.org/leafwatch).

Here's a look at six (free) places to see vibrant fall colors:



Holly Creek Preserve is located in the rugged and remote Cohutta Wilderness in the North Georgia mountains, but is easy to access.



Photo of colors at Berry College, taken by student photographer Lauren Neumann.

Getting there: Travel on I-75 North. Take Exit 293 (U.S. 411). Follow signs to stay on U.S. 411. Go through Chatsworth to Eton. Turn right at stoplight onto CCC Camp Road. Travel 5 miles to the end of the pavement. Park 1/4 mile down on left at old gate. You'll see TNC signs on trees marking boundary.

Open daylight hours. 404-873-6946, [www.nature.org/hollycreek](http://www.nature.org/hollycreek).

### **Berry College**

Berry College, which has been voted as one of the most beautiful college campuses in the country, includes more than 26,000 acres of woodlands, meadows and streams, along with several trails open for hiking and biking. It's located near Rome in northwest Georgia, and you can expect to see a colorful mix of hardwoods and rare montane longleaf pine along the trails, which are open during daylight hours. You may even see a pair of bald eagles that live on campus.

### **Big Trees Forest Preserve**

This is a 30-acre tree, plant and wildlife sanctuary in Sandy Springs. And while you may be able to hear Roswell Road traffic whirring in the distance, walking through this serene forest offers an abundance of color along 1.5 miles of hiking trails winding around two creeks and forests of white oaks, some older than a century.

Open sunrise to sunset daily. Big Trees Forest Preserve. 7645 Roswell Road, Sandy Springs. 770-673-0111, [bigtreesforest.com](http://bigtreesforest.com).

### **Holly Creek Preserve**

Located in the rugged and remote Cohutta Wilderness in the North Georgia mountains, it is still easy to access. Owned by the Nature Conservancy but currently leased by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, this 250-acre preserve is home to many rare aquatic organisms. Nearby, Emery Creek Falls is a breathtaking waterfall in the Chattahoochee National Forest. You'll see a wide range of hardwood trees, including white oaks and hemlocks.

2277 Martha Berry Highway N.W., Mount Berry. 706-232-5374, [www.berry.edu/recreation](http://www.berry.edu/recreation).

### **The Aska Trail System**

The Aska Trails Area is a 17-mile hiking and mountain-biking trail system developed on national forest land near Deep Gap on Aska Road in south Fannin County, not far from Blue Ridge. Check out pine and hardwood forests as they show off for fall on trails ranging from 1 mile to 5.5 miles and loop together to offer short, easy 15-minute hikes to strenuous jaunts of up to five hours or more. The main trailhead is at Deep Gap on Aska Road. Trails are open year-round. Hikes can range from 15 minutes to five hours.

Getting there: I-75 to I-575, which turns into Ga. 515 as you travel through Jasper and Ellijay to Blue Ridge. From Blue Ridge, go south on Aska Road 4.4 miles to Deep Gap parking area below gap and on right side of road.

Open daylight hours. Aska Road, Blue Ridge. 706-745-6928, <http://bit.ly/2eRknyD>.

### **Sweetwater Creek State Park — Lithia Springs**

Check out gorgeous colors at this state park only about a 30-minute drive from Atlanta. The most noticeable reds are from the sourwood trees and the sumacs as well and more subtly, the red maples. The tulip trees (tulip poplars) are yellowing as well as the gorgeous umbrella magnolias along Jack's Branch on the White Trail. Just west of Atlanta, you'll find 9 miles of hiking trails, a beautiful creek and a small lake. For an easy walk, take the popular 1-mile Red Trail, which follows the creek to the ruins of an old mill. For more of a workout, continue past the mill to the Blue Trail, where you'll climb steep bluffs for outstanding creek views. Sign up for a guided hike to learn more about this park's Civil War history.

Open 7 a.m. until sunset. The park is free but visitors must pay a \$5 parking fee (per vehicle).  
1750 Mount Vernon Road, Lithia Springs. 770-732-5871,  
[www.gastateparks.org/SweetwaterCreek](http://www.gastateparks.org/SweetwaterCreek).

### **Deepdene Park**

If you've driven along Ponce de Leon Avenue between Atlanta and Decatur, you've passed a section of Olmsted Linear Park known as Deepdene Park and probably didn't even realize it.

Deepdene Park is filled with trees of the Southern Piedmont forest, perfect for leaf-watching. Trees Atlanta also lists the soaring tulip poplar as one of its many champion trees.

Deepdene was deliberately left undeveloped in original plans by famed landscape designer Frederick Law Olmsted in the late 19th century. Today, a small system of dirt and wood mulch trails winds through the park, stretching 22 acres, and offers lots of fall colors.

Open dawn till dusk; free. Easternmost section of Olmsted Linear Park, located where East Lake Drive splits off Ponce de Leon Avenue. [atlantaolmstedpark.org](http://atlantaolmstedpark.org).