

Conservation Corner

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Autumn is a second spring when every leaf is a flower. – Albert Camus

October has arrived – time once again for Wagon Rides on Three Rivers Trail as Conservation celebrates the 30th anniversary of its annual fall Halloween Hike. In addition to viewing the fall color, we'll take a closer look at the first Iowans who traveled the trail and the artifacts they left behind. I hope many of you will take time to join us at 3:00 p.m. or 6:00 p.m. on Saturday, October 22. Reservations are required – call 712-335-4395 or email conservation@pocahontas-county.com to sign up.

To get everyone in the spirit, I'll open this week with the Cherokee legend "Moon of Falling Leaves" as retold in *Thirteen Moons on Turtle's Back* by Joseph Bruchac and Jonathan London.

"Long ago, the trees were told they must stay awake seven days and nights, but only the cedar, the pine and the spruce stayed awake until that seventh night. The reward they were given was to always be green, while all the other trees must shed their leaves. So, each autumn, the leaves of the sleeping trees fall. They cover the floor of our woodlands with colors as bright as the flowers that come with the spring."

Spring and fall – my favorite seasons for woodland walks, the first to view spring wildflowers and the second to view autumn leaves. Fall is also a good time to identify trees. Can you spot a tree species by its fall color?

Native Iowa trees whose leaves turn yellow include the ash, cottonwood, elm, and hickory species. Walnuts are one of the last trees to leaf out each spring and one of the first trees to turn color each fall, followed in turn by the ash, maple, and oak trees.

Maple trees are known for their fall color with the leaves of silver and other soft maples turning yellow while hard maples, including sugar maples and many cultivars, tend to be more flashy with their rich yellows, oranges, and bright reds.

Oak trees vary widely in fall color from the yellow leaves of our state tree, the bur oak, to the subdued red colors of white oaks and the brilliant red namesake leaves of the red oaks. Bur oaks tend to produce heavy nut crops every other year and have the remarkable ability to synchronize these crops across large geographic regions, yet another example of plants talking to each other.

Several woodland shrubs and vines also provide fall color, especially smooth sumac with its brilliant red leaves and dark red fruit. Other native shrubs with good fall color include nannyberry, hazelnut, highbush cranberry, as well as the dogwoods and viburnums. One of my favorite fall sights is a tree snag ablaze from top to bottom with the fiery large leaflets of Virginia Creeper.

I'll close this week with a challenge. Find the time and a place to seek and enjoy the fall flowers of the sleeping trees.

