

Fall Color Report: October 15, 2021

The rolling landscape of The Morton Arboretum is increasingly colorful this week. Against a background of green, maples are beginning to turn red and orange, and yellow can be seen in elms, catalpas, and many other trees. A long season of drought has made the trees slow to develop their leaf color this year, but they are beginning to weave their autumn tapestry.

To enjoy the developing color, visit the Maple Collection (parking lots 7 and 14); the East Woods (parking lots 8 through 16); the Central and Western Asia, China, and Japan collections (parking lots 16 through 18); the area of the Thornhill Education Center and nearby gardens (Parking Lot 21); and the Schulenberg Prairie (Parking Lot 25).

The intensity, brightness, and longevity of the color display will depend on our upcoming weather, the health of the individual plant, and the amount of soil moisture available to it. Because of the warm and dry weather before the recent rains, fall color is slower to develop this year, and some trees are dropping their leaves early. Some plants' color may not be as vivid as in more favorable years.

Plants in the Visitor Center parking lot and Children's Garden are developing reds and yellows. The American elms in the Elm Collection (Parking Lot 2) are really starting to change this week, as is the large yellow buckeye and patch of pawpaw near Parking Lot 18. The Midwest Collection (parking lots 2 and 5) has gold color developing on bitternuts and shagbark hickories. The view down Frost Hill across the Northern Illinois collection and the river valley shows various shades of green, with sumacs turning red near Parking Lot 2, a few sugar and black maples starting to turn a pale orange tint, and gold developing on hickories.

On the East Side, American elms are continuing to lighten and turn a yellowish-green, as are catalpas, some tuliptrees, redbuds, and some pawpaws. Coffeetrees and hackberries are dropping their yellow leaves. Most ginkgoes are still green, but a few stressed trees near P18 are turning yellow. Some flowering dogwoods have turned a dark reddish color and are dropping leaves. Crabapple fruits (parking lots 4 and 5) are changing to yellow and red, and are more noticeable as the leaves turn and drop.

Buckeyes have mostly dropped their leaves except for Japanese Buckeye, which are turning yellow. Walnuts are turning yellow and dropping their large nuts. Sumac, poison-ivy, and Virginia creeper are turning red (or yellow in the shade). Silver and Freeman maples are turning color in

the Maple Collection (parking lots 7 and 14). The Oak Collection (Parking Lot 8) is still mainly green. A large, prominent sugar maple near parking lot 14 is beginning to change color.

In the woods, the plants along the ground are beginning to turn yellow. The trees in the woodlands (parking lots 9, 10, 13, and 15) are turning a yellow-green, with sugar maples showing early pale-yellow and pale-orange colors. Hackberries, lindens, ashes, black walnuts, and ironwoods are turning yellow.

On the West Side, the woods near parking lots 20 and 23 and around Sterling Pond are turning yellow, with lindens, ironwoods, black walnuts, and redbuds providing most of the color. The Schulenberg Prairie is in its fall glory, with grasses turning color and setting seed, and with highlights of blue and purple provided by asters and gentians.

The upcoming sunny days and the cool nights and rain of recent days should help to brighten the colors in our collections and woodlands. Visit often if you can, because the colors will be changing rapidly!