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WWW.ANDERSONSMAPLESYRUP.COM

Ph: 715-822-8512 Fax: 715-822-8535



Students, State Report News on Fall Hues

How are fall colors in your area stacking up against the rest of Wisconsin? Just leafö it to science students and state tourism to make the answer only a mouse-click away.

On September 8th the Wisconsin Department of Tourism rolled out its annual Fall Color Report at www.TravelWisconsin.com. Thanks to the help of 100 fall color reporters across all of Wisconsin's 72 counties, the Fall Color Report provides up-to-date information on all of the state's changing leaves. Last autumn nearly 215,000 people visited the Fall Color Report, making it one of the top three pages on the Wisconsin Department of Tourism's website. With a color meter gauging counties' leaf change and the time until peak color, all the tools are there for families looking to plan a tour of the state's beautiful transformation.

The yearly color change is a result of a tree's preparation for winter dormancy. As the days become shorter in the fall, water and nutrients are drawn into the tree's stems and away from the leaves ó resulting in the vibrant reds, yellows, and oranges.

öWisconsin sugar maples put on one of the best shows in the country,ö explains fall color expert Steve Anderson, of Anderson's Maple Syrup. öWhat's fascinating is that the spectacular colors are always there ó it's just that every autumn the reduction of chlorophyll, which makes leaves green, allows our favorite hues to shine.ö

Though usually not visible in Wisconsin until mid-to-late September, the chemical change known as leaf senescence actually kicks in around June 21st, the longest day of the year, when plants begin responding to the reduced day length and seek to regulate their life processes.

This concept is not foreign to science students at Island City Research Academy (ICRA) in Cumberland who are enabling classrooms across the state to learn about the life-cycle of sugar maple trees. Anderson's Maple Syrup, an 80-year-old family business, has enlisted ICRA students to tag trees in its Northwoods sugarbush with GPS trackers, allowing classes statewide to study their very own sugar maple. Along the way, students have learned about the scientific process of making maple syrup, while also conducting some experiments of their own ó including the impact climate change might have on Wisconsin syrup production.

This autumn, Anderson's Maple Syrup has expanded its one-of-a-kind program to maple syrup lovers all across the country. Adopt-A-Maple allows youngsters (or the young-at-heart) to adopt their very own Wisconsin sugar maple in the Anderson sugarbush and follow its progress throughout the year as it undergoes fall color change and spring sap harvest. For just \$15, adoptees receive a letter-pressed Certificate of Adoption, the GPS coordinates of their sugar maple to view on Google Earth, background on their specific tree, and an invitation to visit the Anderson family. At www.AndersonsMapleSyrup.com, adoptees can also choose an Anderson's gift box filled with maple goodies, including pure Wisconsin maple syrup from the adopted tree and surrounding sugarbush. With each adoption a donation is made to restore forests in the U.S. damaged by wildfire, ensuring the beautiful fall colors continue for years to come.

Though nothing beats the real thing, area residents clearly have some exciting options for taking in, and learning from, the Wisconsin fall colors with the simple click of a mouse.