

FALL DISCOVERY WALK

Take a walk outdoors this autumn!



Spending time in nature has been proven to improve both our physical and mental wellness. Getting outdoors into the fresh air and exploring the green spaces around us, whether in the forest or in a more urban environment, can lower stress, improve our attention span and brighten our mood. In addition, as we walk, we can witness many life cycles at play, from flora to fauna, while also having time to ourselves for quiet and peaceful contemplation.

“Our identity includes our natural world, how we move through it, how we interact with it, and how it sustains us.” – David Suzuki

Before you go out.



Consider bringing a camera or smartphone and/or a notebook and pencil to record your observations, and any ideas or questions you might want to follow up on. Dress for comfort, safety, and the weather (layers are recommended). Bring along water (preferably in a reusable bottle) and a snack or two. Consider also investing in hiking boots and hiking poles if you are planning a more challenging

hike. And remember to protect yourself from the sun, and from ticks, when going into the woods.

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

As you walk, observe the fall colours.

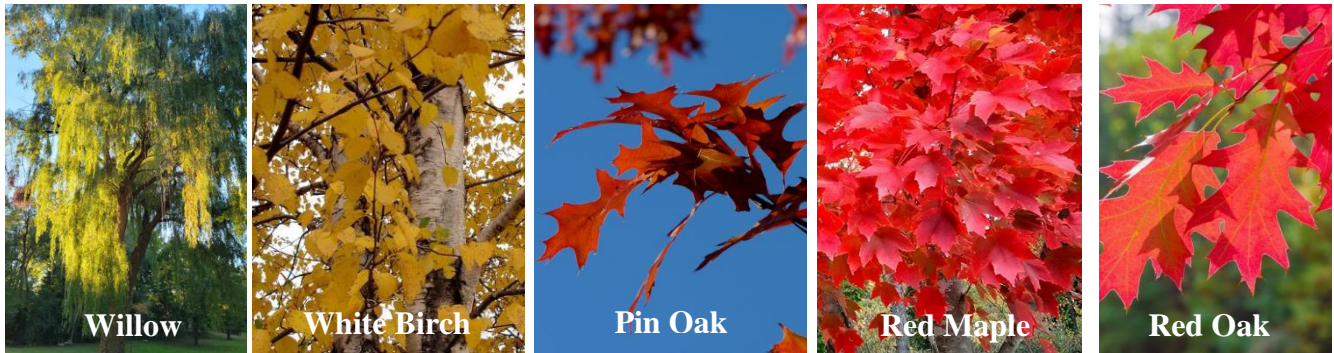


Deciduous trees work towards dropping all of their leaves quickly in the fall as temperatures cool, with the first stage being the breakdown and reabsorption of leaf pigments, which happens when leaves stop their food-making process. Chlorophyll, the green pigment we see predominantly in the summer, disappears first, exposing the other pigments within – yellow, orange, red, or purple – for us to see and enjoy. For more information on the

science of fall colours, and also the impacts of climate change check out this Tree Canada article [here](#).

“I am struck by the simplicity of light in the atmosphere in the autumn, as if the earth absorbed none, and out of this profusion of dazzling light came the autumnal tints.” – Henry David Thoreau

Activity: see if you can spot these trees on your walks this fall!



Take in the unique aromas of fall.



Our ability to smell is because of receptors in our noses that detect aromatic molecules around us. Once leaves begin falling from the trees in the fall, they become food for organisms such as bacteria and fungi and as the leaves break down various gases are released. We are also more able to identify specific scents in the fall compared to summer because the cooler and drier weather makes aromatic

molecules move slower through the air, making them more detectable to our noses.

“The first breath of autumn was in the air, a prodigal feeling, a feeling of wanting, taking, and keeping before it is too late.” – J.L.Carr

Observe the smaller plants and shrubs also – they are going through changes too!

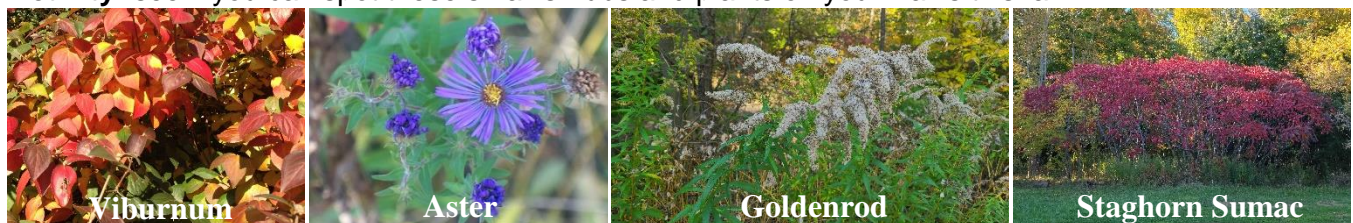


The onset of fall brings colourful changes not just to trees but to smaller plants and shrubs as well. And, some types of flowers such as asters, chrysanthemums and coneflowers are at their “brightest and best” in the fall, with some able to keep blooming until the first hard frost. Fall is also the time of year for seed production for many plants such as milkweed, a plant that is an important food source for many pollinators, especially

the beautiful monarch butterfly whose larvae feed *exclusively* on the leaves of milkweed.

“I’m so glad I live in a world where there are Octobers.” – L.M. Montgomery

Activity: see if you can spot these small shrubs and plants on your walks this fall!



Take a little fall colour home with you.



Who can resist picking up that perfect fall leaf or two (or more)! If you are interested in preserving the leaves you have found, there are several ways to do so, for example, using wax paper or simply storing them between the pages of a magazine. Click on the online resources at [The Spruce](#) and the [Ontario Science Centre](#) for guidance and instructions. Note: if using the leaves for fall crafts, the glycerin method is the most recommended method as the preserved leaves remain supple and pliable.

“As long as autumn lasts, I shall not have hands, canvas, and colors enough to paint the beautiful things I see.” – Vincent Van Gogh

Keep your eyes and ears open for birds migrating south.

Almost 75% of Canada’s birds are migratory. During the fall, these birds migrate to warmer climes,



with some, such as warblers and orioles, flying as far as South America! As you take your walks in the fall, do you notice any change in bird migration from previous years? If so, this is possibly due, at least in part, to climate change, with Canadian Arctic and Boreal birds being the most impacted.

For more information on bird migration or the impact of climate change on migration patterns, check out the online resources at [Birds Canada](#) or [Ducks Unlimited Canada](#)

“My very soul is wedded to it, and if I were a bird I would fly about the Earth seeking the successive autumns.” – George Eliot

Wishing you a Happy Fall from the ACER team!

For additional ACER Discovery Walks, as they become available, or to learn more about ACER, please visit <https://www.acer-acre.ca/>.