



How to Photograph Fall Foliage

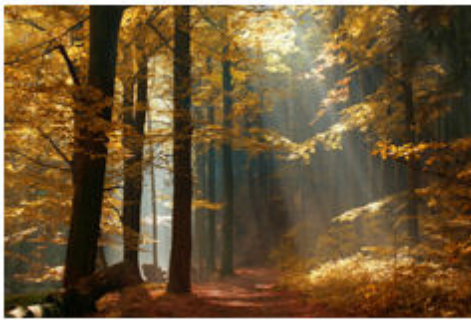
by Barry Baker

Here are a few of my tips for achieving your best fall photos.

Time of Day: You've heard this before, but the time of day and the direction of the sunlight are both critical components in the success or failure of your photographs. Unfortunately, I have seen several more "bad" fall foliage images than good ones. And poor lighting is usually the culprit. First and foremost, you need to avoid taking photos during the middle of the day. At this time, the light tends to be very flat and the colors in your resulting photos will be a huge disappointment. Students and customers have commented that they had no choice but to photograph at midday because that was precisely the time of day that they came upon a gorgeous area of fall color. My response is that it would be best to plan your photo outing or trip a bit more carefully, if possible. The optimal light for photographs occurs during the morning hours as well as in the late afternoon. So try to plan your fall foliage outing accordingly. Even if taking photographs is not your primary goal, the same light is much better for sight-seeing as well as photography.



Lighting: Back to back side lighting will often give you the best color "pop" on your finished image. If you are driving down a beautiful country road at the right time of day and the foliage color still seems a bit dull, simply turn around and look the other way! It's very likely that the lighting will be much better.



Equipment: Having the right equipment along is also a very important factor in achieving great photos. The two most important pieces of equipment that you should use with your camera are a tripod and a good quality polarizing filter. The tripod will come in handy many more times than you can imagine and a polarizing filter is really a must. Polarizing filters work best when your primary light source is at a right angle to you. These filters are also of great benefit in foliage photography because they remove the glare from the surface of the leaves and allow the true color to be more vivid in the photograph.

Settings: To further the quality of your photographs, you should also learn to control the white balance. On my camera, I usually set it to Direct Sunlight, but sometimes I experiment with the Cloudy setting which has a warming effect on the color. In regard to the color setting on your camera, if you have a camera that allows you to change it, then set it to the Vivid color setting. This will increase the strength of the color in your images. Another possible method is to turn up your Contrast control. This will also make the colors come to life. Another tip in achieving good color saturation in your images is to set the ISO as low as possible. I usually set mine to either ISO 100 or 200. This setting keeps the noise level down and the image will look sharper as a result. I also try to keep the composition of my photographs as simple as possible. If the subject is the fall foliage then you should always try to keep competing objects to a minimum. This way the foliage will really be the main attraction.

Locations: Where do I personally like to go in Texas to photograph foliage? Caddo Lake, which is located on the Texas/Louisiana border, offers a great opportunity for strong images of cypress tree foliage. You might not want to limit yourself to just taking photographs from the banks, so why not consider one of the fall foliage tour boats? Lost Maples Natural Area on the Sabinal River in western Bandera County is another wonderful location for photographs, but it is well known and often a bit crowded. McKittrick Canyon, within the Guadalupe Mountains National Park, is located in the Chihuahuan Desert of west Texas. Quite a drive, but well worth the extra effort! Hint: You will need to make lodging arrangements in Whites City, NM where Carlsbad Caverns is located. Outside of Texas, I enjoy traveling to southeastern Oklahoma and Northwestern Arkansas where I have found spectacular foliage that rivals the colors I have seen in New England. For the Arkansas trip, take Interstate 75 north to Interstate 40 east. Follow this route to Alma, Arkansas. From Alma, travel north on the old Highway 71, which takes you into the Ouachita and Ozark Mountains. You'll see spectacular views of fall foliage and panoramic river valleys.



Remember: Last of all, don't forget to take along enough memory and don't get caught short on batteries for your camera! Have fun and enjoy your social time in nature.