Tips for Photographing Fall Colors

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Fall colors are based on timing and a complex interaction of environmental factors. These include rainfall, temperature and increasing night length, which trigger a series of chemical processes in the leaves. As the days become shorter and the nights cooler, the green chlorophyll in the leaves begins to degrade and other naturally occurring pigments emerge. Different pigments create different colors.

The most vibrant colors come when a drier summer is followed by crisp autumn nights. However, in drought conditions, the leaves will fall before they fully turn.

The ideal time to shoot Fall Colors is in the Golden Light (early in the morning or late in the afternoon). Shoot at the lowest ISO and the highest Aperture (F22, F16, etc) possible.

Try to avoid shooting in the middle of the day because of the harsh light. However, if you do shoot then, consider back lighting. Position a leaf or leaves between your camera and the sun. The back lighting will illuminate it all the way through making it appear to glow and revealing the details of the veins.

Don't let cloudy or rainy days stop you. Either type day will bring out the color like nothing else. If the sky is grey and overcast you will want to minimize the amount of sky you show. After a rain, the air will be the clearest.

Look for color contrasts, such as bright colors against an evergreen background. Don't be afraid to use a telephoto lens to pick out details in the landscape as well as wide angle lenses when there is a lot of color.

If you are around water, look for reflections. The best time is early in the morning when the water is calm. However, ripples in the water can add a different perspective to a photo.

Do not forget to use good Composition. It is easy to become overwhelmed by all the great colors and forget everything else. Fall colors don't create a good landscape photo on their own; they simply add an element of color. You still need a strong center of interest.