

# NEWS RELEASE

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## Fall Foliage Should Be Vibrant Despite Recent Storms in N.C. Mountains

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The aftermath of Hurricanes Frances, Ivan and Jeanne shouldn't have a major impact on the changing leaves in western North Carolina, but the storms have certainly made traveling to the mountains to view this year's colorful array of foliage more difficult.

Dr. Robert Bardon, associate professor of forestry and extension forestry specialist at North Carolina State University, says the strong winds and heavy rains brought on by tropical storms in recent weeks shouldn't affect the tapestry of colors in the mountain region this fall.

"The trees are growing well and are not under a lot of stress," Bardon said. "It doesn't appear that the wind has done much to defoliate the crowns. The hurricanes will have an impact on tourism with the damaged roads, but they shouldn't have an effect on the trees."

However, the vibrancy of the colors this will depend largely on the weather during the next few weeks. Warm, sunny days followed by cool evenings with temperatures above freezing produce the best fall colors, Bardon says.

During the spring and summer months, leaves manufacture most of the foods necessary for the trees' growth. The food-making process occurs in cells that contain the pigment chlorophyll, which gives the leaves their green color. The leaves also contain other pigments that are masked most of the year by the greater amount of green coloring.

In the fall, when days get shorter and cooler, leaves stop making food. As the chlorophyll naturally begins to break down, the green color disappears and yellow colors surface. Other chemical changes create additional pigments that vary from yellow to red to blue.

Leaves at higher elevations in North Carolina, such as Mount Mitchell, have already started to change colors, Bardon says. However, leaf viewers have lots of time to make a trip to see colors not just in the mountains, but all across the state.

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“In North Carolina we have a large window of several weeks to view fall colors,” Bardon says. “If someone doesn’t get to see fall colors in the mountains, they can head down toward the coast and still see colors later in the fall.”

Bardon advises those traveling to view the leaves in western North Carolina to plan ahead. The storms damaged parts of popular tourist routes, including parts of the Blue Ridge Parkway and Interstate 40 west of Asheville.

“I would tell people who are interested in going to the mountains to call ahead to the area they are going to make sure they can get around and won’t hamper recovery operations,” Bardon says.

Rendezvous Mountain State Park and Stone Mountain State Park, which are both located in Wilkes County, and Pilot Mountain State Park, located north of Winston-Salem, are areas that offer good viewing opportunities in places that should not hamper hurricane recovery operations, Bardon says.