

Canon

GUIDE TO FALL PHOTOGRAPHY

INTRODUCTION

Autumn brings a seasonal change that inspires photographers across the nation: Fall Foliage. The season's dramatic landscapes are stunning to behold and with this guide, you'll learn how to capture the unique quality of the season and preserve its beauty in still photographs that you can post or print at home with one of Canon's printers.

Fall foliage is a beautiful display of the changing seasons, exhibiting bright-colored leaves on trees — perfect subjects unto themselves. There's just something special when a tree, or a landscape full of trees, turns brilliant colors. However, if you take it a step further — give the tree some dramatic lighting, throw in a compositional aid such as a creek or road, make use of color filter effects, and think carefully about framing and composition — then you're on the right track to taking a great photo that doesn't just rely on pretty colors.



LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

In New England, most scenes include scenic structures such as a picket fence or a quaint church with a steeple. The Mid-Atlantic states and Midwest regions have large areas of rolling hillsides, with possibly some farming composition opportunities. The West has grand mountain landscapes with pockets of color and majestic mountain peaks.

Out West, the colors seem more influenced by altitude than latitude. At the 10,000 ft. level, foliage can be in full color by the end of September. Foliage at 4,000-5,000 ft. altitudes will usually change color around the end of October.





GET CLOSER

The temptation to capture only wide shots of entire forests or mountainsides may be hard to resist — however, it's great to have a variety of shots. Shoot the panoramic landscapes, but also remember that beauty is often found in the details. Macro photography is a great way to explore the colors and textures of autumn, while also using unique points-of-view.

Another way to get closer is simply switching to a longer telephoto lens, or zooming to a longer focal length with a zoom lens. Telephotos are great for isolating parts of subjects, and they will usually throw your backgrounds beautifully out of focus. Try focusing close with that telephoto lens — with many of today's zoom lenses, you can fill the frame with a single large leaf.

- Out-of-focus backgrounds are a photographic effect you can heighten, or reduce, by controlling your aperture: wider apertures will result in a shallower range of focus, and softer backgrounds. Smaller apertures will increase the depth of field, resulting in sharper backgrounds.

- You'll need to make a creative choice depending upon the background, and how much of the background you want to see in the image. This is a perfect reason to switch to your camera's **Av (Aperture-priority)** exposure mode if you've been using fully automatic exposure up until now. Take the time to consider the background and experiment with more dynamic ways to make your main subject stand out.

- Don't forget the power of wide-angle lenses. A standard zoom lens, such as an 18-55mm lens, 24-70mm or 24-105mm on a full-frame camera, can produce some spectacular results — especially if you move in close at its widest setting and focus on one object in the foreground. A low-hanging branch with leaves can suddenly become a broad burst of color and detail if you move in and focus on the nearest leaf.



LIGHTING

Most photographers will agree that lighting is the most important element in creating a good photo. This is especially true when shooting fall foliage, because understanding how to use sunlight to the best of your ability will make those colors as bright and vivid as you want them.

One of the ideal times to shoot is during the ”magic hour” or “golden hour“ — generally during the first half-hour right after the sun rises in the morning, and the last half-hour just before the sun sets at the end of the day. During these times, the quality of light is ideal for autumn landscape photography as the sunlight is naturally warm, rich, and golden-hued – further enhancing the colorful leaves. The angle of the sunlight is lower and more directional, helping create enhanced textures and shapes when using it as side-light, or increased depth if used as a backlight.

The quality of sunlight during these times is more diffused, with a pleasing contrast that is less likely to overexpose in the highlights, or underexpose in the shadows.

Hazy or overcast lighting bring a completely new set of opportunities. These forms of lighting are diffused, or non-directional, so they produce shadowless subjects and render your colors to appear as soft pastel shades. On overcast days, keep as much white sky out of your frame as possible. Fall showers can inspire beautiful photo opportunities, as well. They can make fall foliage look even more saturated during or right after a rainstorm, and moody skies can offer that perfect contrast to the leaves. Take this opportunity to use a macro lens and focus on details such as raindrops clinging to the leaves.

Back-lighting can really increase the rich color of fall foliage. Shoot some back-lit pictures with the sun coming toward the camera and shining through leaves. Adjust the camera, using other leaves to block the sun, and shade the lens in order to reduce or eliminate lens flare.

Bright sunlight in the middle of the day can have its own benefits, even though the character of clear sunlight from overhead is often less flattering to foliage than when the sun is lower in the sky. One thing that can really enhance pictures shot midday with sunlight is a Circular Polarizing filter, which reduces the reflection on the surface of the leaves, and deepens the color. We’ll discuss filters in a moment.



EXPOSURE

The secret to metering any lighting situations is to fill the frame with the light you're trying to photograph. This can be accomplished in three ways:

1. First, you can move closer to the subject to fill the frame – but this can be difficult if you're framing some trees with a distant mountain in the background.

2. The second solution is to use the longest focal length on your zoom lens, or a long telephoto prime lens, to crop your frame tightly onto your main subject, and meter it in isolation from distracting elements in the scene that may otherwise confuse your meter. After half-pressing the shutter button to engage metering, use the **Auto Exposure (AE) Lock** by pressing once on the rear button (which is the one with the asterisk icon on Canon EOS DSLRs) to hold that exposure in place. Then reposition the lens or zoom out to the correct focal length for the best composition, re-focus, and take the picture.

3. Finally, **Spot or Partial Metering** can help you isolate exposure on one critical area of a scene, and you can then lock it in with one press of the **rear AE Lock button**. Be sure your camera is in a **Creative Zone exposure mode (P, Tv, Av, or M)**, so you can change metering to either **Spot or Partial**. Place the center area of your viewfinder on the part of the scene you want to meter from, half-press the shutter button to begin metering and then press the **AE Lock button** to hold that reading. Using **Manual Exposure** mode, and simply adjusting aperture/shutter speed until the analog meter scale in the viewfinder reads proper exposure, is another great feature to combine with **Spot** or **Partial** metering. Once your exposure is set, it won't change as you move your camera around.

Even though it isn't directly exposure-related, if you're working in bright sunlight (early or late in the day) with a Canon EOS DSLR camera, consider activating the camera's **Highlight Tone Priority**. This can really help take some of the edge off of bright specular highlights, giving you more detail in bright areas of leaves and foliage, and helping to enhance overall detail — without simply darkening the entire scene. **Highlight Tone Priority** is usually activated in the **Custom Function** area of the menu for most EOS Rebel models, and in the Shooting menu for most mid-range and high-end Canon EOS DSLR cameras.



PLAYING WITH COLOR

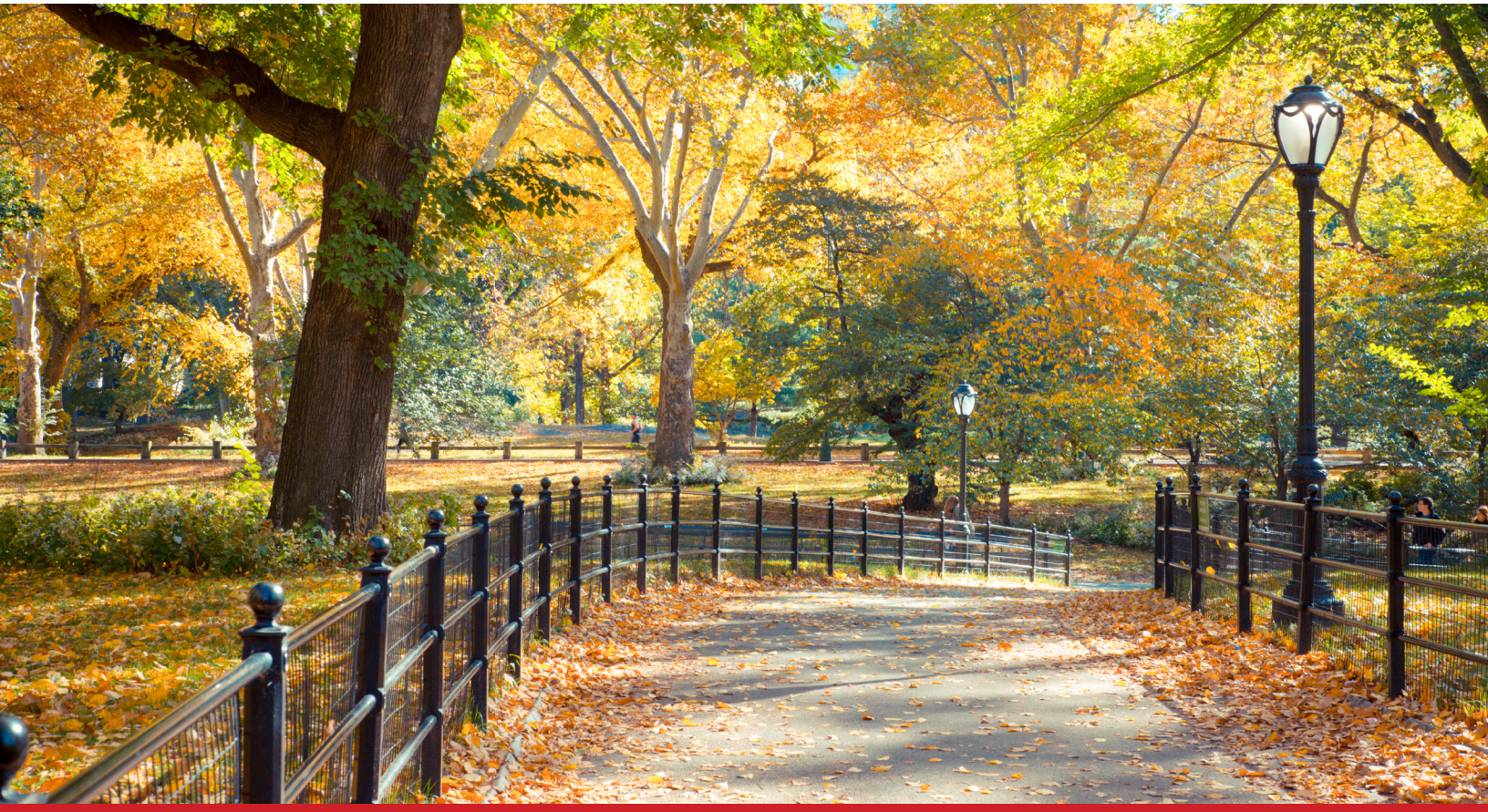
Once you find the perfect scene for your photos, don't just consider how to capture the colors, but also how to really make the most of them in a way that compliments your overall image.

The camera's **White Balance (WB)** settings will help create different tonal effects. Simply switching from **Automatic White Balance (AWB)** or **Daylight** to the **Shade** or **Cloudy** modes will add a warm, golden hue to your image. Also, try to shift your camera's white balance towards amber or amber/magenta to add warmth to the image. (You can easily do this with the **WB Shift/Bracket** feature, a menu option on most of Canon's recent EOS DSLRs).

Use a custom **WB** (such as with an ExpoDisk Portrait, or blue WarmCard White Balance Reference) to create a golden cast to your photos. In your RAW images, if there is a subject or object that is white or neutral grey, try using the "click" **WB** feature when you view the images in Canon's Digital Photo Professional (DPP) software.

Remember that contrast can help colors to "pop". For example, the warm tones of autumn leaves will be enhanced with the subtle inclusion of something cool (blue or blue-green) in the frame, like a vivid sliver of sky or a blue-painted house strategically placed in the foreground.

As a reminder, **WB** settings are "locked in" to JPEG images, but can always be changed when processing a RAW file.



HIGH DYNAMIC RANGE (HDR)

High Dynamic Range (HDR) imaging is an alteration to digital image files, providing more visible detail in bright and dark areas of a scene. There are several basic ways to achieve this:

- Shoot multiple images of the same scene at different exposure settings and use special HDR software to process them into one finished HDR image.

- Shoot a single RAW image, process it in multiple versions (lighter and darker); then use third-party HDR software to blend these separate files into one finished HDR image.

- In-camera HDR shooting, use the built-in **HDR** feature, found in the Shooting Menu of some high-end Canon EOS DSLR cameras. Shoot three images in-camera, and have the camera produce a finished JPEG result, which it writes to the memory card. (Note: Be sure to check your camera's manual to see if your camera has this feature).

- Use the in-camera **HDR Backlight Control**, a fully-automated shooting mode on some EOS models that takes three quick initial images, and then processes them into a single finished image with expanded detail, especially in dark shadows. (Note: Be sure to check your camera's manual to see if your camera has this feature).

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Multi-image HDR is created by combining several images of different bracketed exposures, taken at the same time in rapid sequence. This is the traditional method and depending on the number of bracketed images your camera can take, it offers the widest range of exposure and tonal detail to create your HDR image. However, for multi-image HDR to work effectively, there can be absolutely no movement in the scene during the sequence of bracketed shots. The challenge with foliage is the amount of movement from frame to frame with wind potentially blowing the branches, leaves moving, clouds passing across the sky, and other uncontrollable elements.

Where subject motion is possible, as with landscapes, the single-image process may be preferable. It starts with a single RAW image — from there, you process it several times with software such as DPP; processing is varied to create intentionally light, dark and neutral renditions of the single RAW exposure. Then, use an editing program with HDR capability, such as Photomatix™ or Adobe® Photoshop® to combine those images and create an expanded dynamic range. You can create HDR effects that range from subtly increasing detail in the highlights and shadows, to much more dramatic effects that surreally exaggerate the colors and tones in your scene.

THINKING BEYOND COLOR

The most difficult part of fall foliage photography for most people is simply finding the right subject. Ironically, it's easy to be distracted with the color, so that actual subject content and scene composition are less important that the leaves. The secret to overcoming this challenge is to start by getting rid of the color — that way, you can concentrate on finding the perfect subject, composition, and lighting to "hold" the color. To do this, try using the Monochrome Picture Style mode.

How will **Monochrome Picture Style** help you? Your images will appear in black and white on your camera's LCD, and without the distraction of color, you'll be better able to find that perfect combination of scenic composition, point of focus, angle of light, subject texture, etc. These are the elements that will make your photos really powerful.

It's important to note that if you shoot JPEG images in-camera, your Picture Style is locked in – so the monochrome image you capture in-camera will remain a monochrome image. If you shoot RAW images, however, you'll preserve all the original color information in the photo, allowing you to produce a finished color or B&W photo – even if you originally shot it with the **Monochrome Picture Style**.

If you prefer shooting in **Monochrome Picture Style**, Canon EOS DSLR cameras also allow you to simulate the effect of applying traditional yellow, orange, red, or green filters used with B&W photographic film. When using the color filter effects, the B&W tones are portrayed differently, depending on the color. Basically, each filter will lighten its own color tones, and darken their complimentary tones. For example, a green filter will lighten green grass and darken reds or yellows, such as warm skin tones. The red filter will lighten the deep reddish or golden tones of autumn leaves, and darken a blue sky, resulting in a very dramatic effect.



FILTERS

Although there are many different creative filters you can put on a camera lens, three stand out with Canon EOS DSLRs for foliage, scenic and landscape images:

- **The Circular Polarizer Filter**
  This popular filter performs functions that still, to this day, cannot be achieved in the same manner with even the most advanced image-editing software. It can enhance colors in non-metallic subjects by reducing, or even eliminating, glare and reflections from their surfaces. And, it can deepen clear blue skies (particularly when the camera is aimed at approximately 90° from the direction of sunlight). Finally, for distant shots on sunny days, it can help to minimize atmospheric haze. On clear days, the effect of a Circular Polarizing filter can be vivid enough to change the look of your images.

- **Neutral Density Filters**
  Available in various strengths, these filters are simply light-reduction tools which allow the use of slower shutter speeds (and/or wider lens apertures) in brightly-lit conditions. Gray to the naked eye, good ones have no impact on color, and unlike a Circular Polarizer, Neutral Density filters don't have any impact on reflections or color saturation. Neutral Density filters come in several calibrated levels, often rated as .3 ND, .6 ND, .9 ND and 1.2 ND, with each .3 ND rating representing one stop of light. Therefore the .6 ND filter would reduce light by two stops, the .9 ND filter reduces light by three stops and the 1.2 ND will reduce by four stops of light. These filters can be stacked in any combination to achieve the desired amount of light reduction needed in brightly lit circumstances or when used for longer exposures.

- **Graduated Neutral Density Filters**
  The Graduated Neutral Density filters come in the same ratings, but are clear on the bottom and slightly opaque on the top, with either an abrupt (hard edge 'grad') or a gradual shift (soft edge 'grad') in the middle. They are used to darken the brighter part of a scene so that it falls within the dynamic range of the camera.

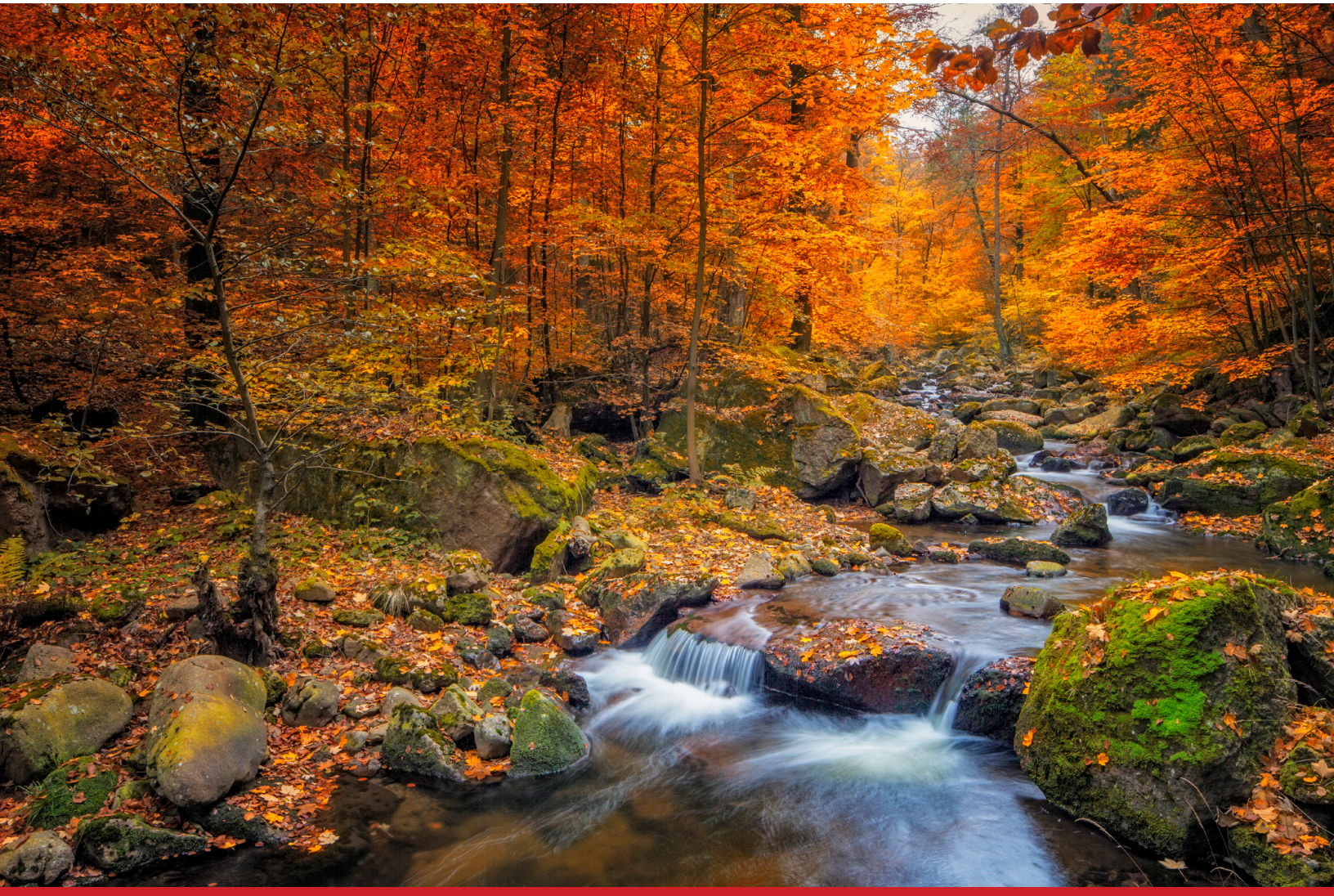


STEADINESS & STABILIZATION

One way to improve the overall quality of your photographs is to use a tripod. A tripod accomplishes a few very important goals, as outlined below.

It allows you to shoot at slower shutter speeds than you would normally get away with, even with a camera that uses In-body **Image Stabilization (IBIS)** or a lens with **Image Stabilization (IS)**. It permits using significantly smaller lens apertures for greater depth-of-field — or simply for greater sharpness at one area of a scene. Perhaps even more importantly, shooting on a tripod tends to make photographers more aware of their horizontal and vertical level, as you'll notice right away if the horizon is not perfectly straight or if your subject looks off-balance in the frame. Lastly, even the fairly minimal effort it takes to set up and level a tripod makes you work slower and more deliberately, which can help photographers notice imaging possibilities they may have otherwise missed with faster, hand-held shooting.

If you're not using a tripod and you're using a lens with IS, our suggestion is simple: turn the IS on. In hand-held situations, it's an easy way to obtain clear, sharp pictures. In general, the only time we suggest turning the IS off is when your camera is mounted on a solid, steady tripod.



SUMMARY

Autumn is a great opportunity for all photographers to make some really colorful and outstanding photographs.

There are few subjects as universally inspiring as fall foliage. Remember to look for different ways to shoot familiar subjects, whether it's up-close, down low, with filters, after dawn, or during a storm — and you'll find it pays off in many wonderful, dynamic shots that capture the spirit of the season.





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