



# Falling colours

Many of the great gardens of the Weald stay open until the end of October to allow visitors to see splendid autumnal displays. Here are the best

Words by Caroline Edmunds pictures by Darryl Curcher

**T**he best thing about autumn, which just about makes up for shorter days and cooler temperatures, is the spectacular show of colourful leaves. So enamoured are we of this seasonal phenomenon, that we feel cheated if the arboreal autumn display is not as awe-inspiring as we have come to expect.

But how many of us have considered why leaves change their colours so beautifully at this time of year? It's a question of science, of course.

Tree roots suck up moisture containing minerals and nutrients from the soil and pass it into their leaves, where they are



converted into sugar and starches – tree food. Sunshine is needed to activate this process and the leaves contain chlorophyll, a green pigment which traps the sunlight to enable photosynthesis. Lots of sunshine leads to plenty of chlorophyll and rich green leaves.

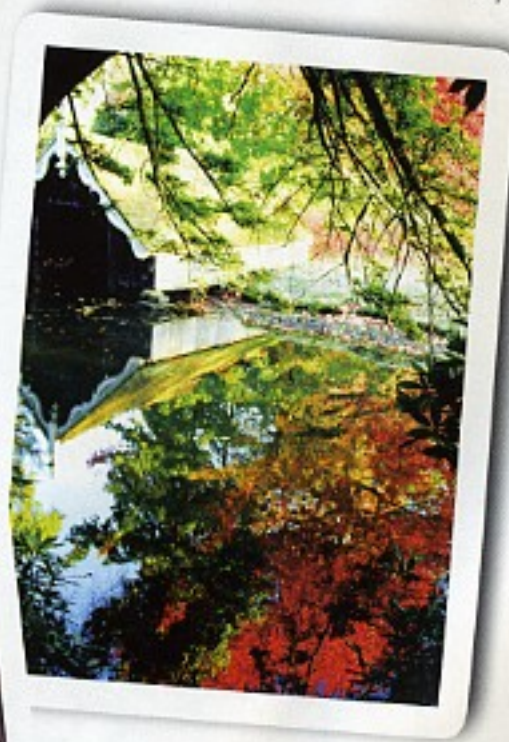
As the days shorten and temperatures drop in autumn, trees prepare for winter by developing cells at the base of each leaf, which seal them off, interrupting the flow of nutrients and resulting in the formation of less chlorophyll.

As the green fades, other pigments from the sugars and starches begin to show: carotene leads to the golds and

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Marshal's Lake



> yellows, while anthocyanins appear as reds and purples. Eventually, even these colours fade in light or when they are frozen, leaving only tannins – a brown, bitter pigment which actually helps trees resist foraging animals and insects. This explains why leaves remaining on deciduous trees in winter are always brown.

Variations in temperature lead to variations in colours and for the best show of reds and golds, the ideal weather is dry, sunny days and cool, dry nights. We can but hope.

### Wonderful woodland

The Weald of Kent certainly has more than its fair share of woodlands in which to observe the science of leaf colour changes and leaf fall – in fact around a quarter of the High Weald is wooded compared to an average of a tenth across Britain as a whole.

You can take a stroll along one of the many footpaths or opt for a more formal garden visit – you are sure of a fine



showing whichever you choose.

The National Pinetum and Forest at Bedgebury, one of the Seven Wonders of the Weald, near Goudhurst, is an excellent place to start your observations as it contains not just evergreen conifers, but a wide variety of trees, both native and exotic, which each respond to autumn's changes in their own colourful way.

Oaks, black birches, tulip trees, ginkgos and the aptly named liquidambar are particularly renowned for their hues, while dawn redwoods and swamp cypresses go against type by turning shades of burnt amber and fox red before shedding their needles.

Many of the great gardens stay open until the end of October to allow visitors to see the autumnal displays in all their glory. Hever Castle even runs a special Garden Week during the month, where gardeners lead free tours.

Hole Park Garden near Rolvenden, is particularly well known for its autumn beauty: the golds and russets of oaks and brilliant reds of acers are matched by the

multi-coloured shades of liquid amber and rusty reds and purples of the *fothergilla major* shrub.

Purple heathers and the rich foliage of many azaleas continue the theme. Normally only open on Wednesday and Thursday afternoons until the end of October, Hole Park opens especially on Sundays from 30 September to 21 October to share the seasonal bounty of colour with visitors.

Scotney Castle Garden and Estate, another of the Seven Wonders of the Weald, has a magnificent backdrop for which to see glorious autumn colour from around late September onwards. Golden tulip trees and crimson liquid ambers, vibrant colours of Japanese maples and acers take centre stage against a backcloth of parkland and woodland which are part of the 770-acre Scotney Estate and perfect for long walks. ■

For website details, visit:  
[www.kent-life.co.uk](http://www.kent-life.co.uk) and click on 'links.'

## Autumn events around Kent

**Sat 6 and Sunday 7 Oct, 11am to 4pm**  
 Kite Weekend at Bewl Water, near Lamberhurst

Colour of a different kind – bring your own kite; also traders, stalls and workshops.

Admission to Bewl: £6 per car.

Tel: 01892 890171.

**Sat 6 Oct and Sat 20 Oct, 10am to 1pm**  
 Fungi Identification Walk, Bedgebury

National Pinetum, near Goudhurst  
 Another autumn speciality. Wander around Bedgebury with George Niklas, an expert on fungi. He can tell you what you can eat and what you should not touch. Price £8 per person.

Booking essential.

Tel: 01580 879820.

**Sun 7 and Sun 14 Oct**

Autumn Tours with the head gardener, Quentin Stark, at Hole Park Gardens, Rolvenden. Guided tour through delightful gardens renowned for autumn colour. £2.50, plus normal admission of £4 for adults.

Tel: 01580 241344.

**Mon 8 to Sun 14 Oct**

Autumn Colour Week at Hever Castle and Gardens, Hever, near Edenbridge  
 Castle gardeners show visitors around the gardens and discuss autumn gardening topics. The stunning bronzes, reds and yellows around the gardens, especially those reflecting in the lake and outer moat, make this time of year very special at Hever Castle. The tours are included in the normal ticket price (from £8.40 for gardens only, adult) and will take place at set times during the day.

Tel: 01732 865224.

**Thu 11 Oct, 11am**

A Country Walk from Ightham Mote 5.5 miles led by Roy Garrett, booking recommended. Donations to Ightham Mote Appeal Fund welcome.

Tel: 01732 810380.

**Sat 20 Oct, 9.30am to 12.30pm**

Deer Tracks and Signs Walk in King's Wood, Challock. Guided by Steve Peters, booking advised, tickets £3.

Tel: 01795 530490.