

## **In praise of... autumn leaves**

The Guardian

Fresh buds are but a memory. The blossom is long gone and the berries have all been picked by jammakers, winemakers or birds. Now is the time for our trees to give us their fourth and most spectacular seasonal gift: the gallery of autumn colours as the leaves die and fall.

The display is sensational, free and democratic. It may be stunning in the country, but there are as many subtle shades on a single street tree, particularly where councils have been adventurous in choosing species to plant. We spend a lot on sophisticated forms of pleasure, but here is one that costs nothing. It is fleeting, but stays in the mind for a long time.

Tree planting scarcely needs encouragement nowadays, with almost every school engaged in nurturing specimens and using them in the national curriculum. The National Forest - once little more than a series of puzzling hoardings in fields beside the M1 and M42 - is developing into a sylvan tract that would satisfy Robin Hood. But there are still battles to be fought. Surveyors and insurers still betray a nervousness about trees near buildings which accident statistics do not justify. Fusspots about tidiness win the odd misconceived battle over the costs of sweeping or the menace of breaking an ankle on decomposing mulch.

We can be too recessional about autumn, too. Mourn the fall, but enjoy the trees' final seasonal delight. The tracery of naked branches and twigs is the next of nature's doorstep wonders, especially if this winter brings us snow.

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