

# AUTUMN SPLENDOR

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While every season marks a turning point in the year, perhaps none is more dramatic than autumn. Picture it in your imagination. Images of incomparable beauty flood the memory with magnificent foliage, leaves shimmering in the sunlight, a riot of color fluttering in the trees. It is the season of ripeness, the time of harvest when farmers reap the fruits of their labors and families visit pumpkin patches and orchards to enjoy the bounties of the earth.

Small wonder that autumn has given rise to so many festive traditions. Pumpkins, picked and carved, decorate our doorsteps and our lives. There are orchards full of apples to eat, to cook for applesauce, bake into pies or dumplings and apple cider to make. Warm sunshine and crisp, cool air beckon us outdoors during the early days of autumn to a picnic in the park or a barbecue with friends in the backyard. People gather at State Fairs, local carnivals and contests to judge who grew the biggest, best or even the ugliest tomato. Perhaps there is even an Oktoberfest somewhere in the area with singing and dancing. There are so many things for which we can be thankful.

By way of contrast, stormy days mark the change of seasons – terrifying lightning flashes across the sky eventually touching down on earth. Tremendous claps of thunder call attention to how close the storm is. We long for the noise to fade into the distance. At times hurricane winds roar in from the sea. Oceans and rivers rise to flood large areas. Mother Nature struggles with water, wind, and fire as she sweeps summer out of autumn's path. At the height of these storms, dogs howl, families huddle together in the safest spot in their homes; many whisper a prayer for deliverance. Others evacuate their homes altogether to travel as far from danger as possible.

As the season progresses, leaves fall, trees become bare. Days are shorter; darkness sets in early and lasts longer. The shifting light affects the tone of celebrations. Halloween, though marked by parties, exposes the dark side of life with scary masks and costumes and stories about ghostly figures and other surreal beings. Church feasts turn our attention to the end of life. All Saints Day marks the passage through death to everlasting life of those whose lives show us the way home to God. All Souls Day invites us to remember those no longer with us who have touched our lives. We pray for them and entrust them to the merciful love of God who created them.

Thanksgiving is the peak of the season is. Families come together from near and far for a festive meal to celebrate God's gifts of food and life and the love that binds them together. The roots of this feast lie deep in our nation's history. We remember the tale of a group of New England colonists and a local tribe of Indians who in sharing the food of their harvest manifested their desire to live together in peace. May we be filled with that spirit this year.

One poet calls this season the year's last, loveliest smile. With eyes wide open and hearts full of gratitude, let us lift up our hearts in prayer to God, Creator of all that is, from whom all these blessings flow.

