

The Colors of Fall in California State Parks

Cooler weather, fewer visitors, and the changing colors of the landscape make a fall visit to a state park an excellent getaway, whether for a weekend or just a day. And, with 278 California State Parks to choose from, there is something for everyone.

You don't have to go to New England to see the leaves change color. Many state parks in Northern and Southern California display the colors of fall. Poison oak is changing color as the vine changes from green to red leaves and can look beautiful climbing up a tree trunk. (It's wise to remember the old saying, "Leaves of three, let them be.")

Here's a sampling of some sites to visit. (It's always a good idea to call ahead to check on conditions in the park.)

Southern California

Cuyamaca Rancho State Park (SAN DIEGO COUNTY) is northeast of San Diego, located on Highway 79, five miles north of I-8, (760) 765-0755. The main fall color tree is the Black Oak. The leaves often turn a nice golden yellow.

Montaña de Oro State Park (SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY), south of Morro Bay, (805) 528-0513 or 772-7434.

Mount San Jacinto State Park (RIVERSIDE COUNTY), in Idyllwild, (909) 659-2607 or (760) 767-5311.

Palomar Mountain State Park (SAN DIEGO COUNTY), off Highway 76, up Highway S6, left on Highway S7, at the junction near the peak. The park features

a nice autumn vista of bracken fern in the meadows turning a rich golden brown against the dark green of adjacent forests.

Northern California

Ahjumawi Lava Springs State Park (SHASTA COUNTY), northeast of Redding, (530) 335-2777 or 225-2065.

Annadel State Park (SONOMA COUNTY), east of Santa Rosa, (707) 539-3911 or 938-1519. The park has Big Leaf Maples near creeks that have turned yellow in some areas, due to stress from lack of rainwater. The park also has some Black Oaks.

Auburn State Recreation Area (PLACER and EL DORADO COUNTIES), northeast of Sacramento, (530) 885-4527.

Bodie State Historic Park (MONO COUNTY), seven miles south of Bridgeport, (760) 647-6445.

Bothe-Napa Valley State Park (NAPA/SONOMA COUNTIES), four miles north of St. Helena on Highways 29/128, (707) 942-4575 / 938-1519. The park is known for its Big Leaf Maples. There are also Black Oaks.

Calaveras Big Trees State Park (CALAVERAS and TUOLUMNE COUNTIES), four miles northeast of Arnold, (209) 795-2334.

Castle Crags State Park (SHASTA and SISKIYOU COUNTIES), six miles of Dunsmuir, (530) 235-2684.

Castle Rock State Park (SANTA CRUZ and SANTA CLARA COUNTIES), in the Santa Cruz Mountains, (408) 867-2952.

Clear Lake State Park (LAKE COUNTY), north of Calistoga, (707) 279-4293 or 938-1519. The park features Black Oaks.

Grover Hot Springs State Park (ALPINE COUNTY), south of Lake Tahoe, three miles west of Markleeville on Hot Springs Road, (530) 694-2248 or 525-7232.

Henry W. Coe State Park (SANTA CLARA & STANISLAUS COUNTIES), 40 minutes from Morgan Hill and U.S. 101 via East Dunne Avenue, (408) 779-2728. October is usually the best month to enjoy the colors in this park. Forests on the north-facing slopes have many deciduous trees. Big Leaf Maples turn bright yellow and Black Oaks can include some reds. California Buckeyes split their leathery husks and display shiny brown nuts that gave them their name.

Humboldt Redwoods State Park (HUMBOLDT COUNTY), south of Eureka on Highway 101 and Avenue of the Giants, (707) 946-2409.

Lake Oroville State Recreation Area (BUTTE COUNTY), seven miles east of Oroville, (530) 538-2200.

McArthur-Burney Falls Memorial State Park (SHASTA COUNTY), northeast of Redding, six miles north of Highway 229 on Highway 89 near Burney, (530) 335-2777. Best time to see the changing colors in this park is usually mid-October. Look for Big Leaf Maple, various deciduous Oaks, Redbud, California Black Oak, Oregon White Oak, White Alder, Pacific Dogwood, Oregon Ash, Vine Maple, Buckbrush, Deerbrush, Red Flowering Currant, and Squaw Bush.

Plumas-Eureka State Park (PLUMAS COUNTY), four miles west of Graeagle, (530) 836-2380.

Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park (HUMBOLDT & DEL NORTE COUNTIES), north of Eureka, (707) 464-6101, extension 5300. The primary fall colors here are Big Leaf Maple, Vine Maple – and poison oak!

Sinkyone Wilderness State Park (HUMBOLDT & MENDOCINO), north of Fort Bragg, (707) 986-7711 and 247-3319.

South Yuba River State Park (NEVADA COUNTY), off Highway 49, five miles north of Nevada City, (530) 273-3884.

Sugar Pine Point State Park (EL DORADO COUNTY), south of Tahoe City, (530) 525-7982 or 525-7232. Some of the best color in the Tahoe area can be found along Highway 89 from South Lake Tahoe to Sugar Pine Point State Park.

Woodson Bridge State Recreation Area (TEHAMA COUNTY), northwest of Chico, (530) 839-2112. The park has primarily Valley Oaks.

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