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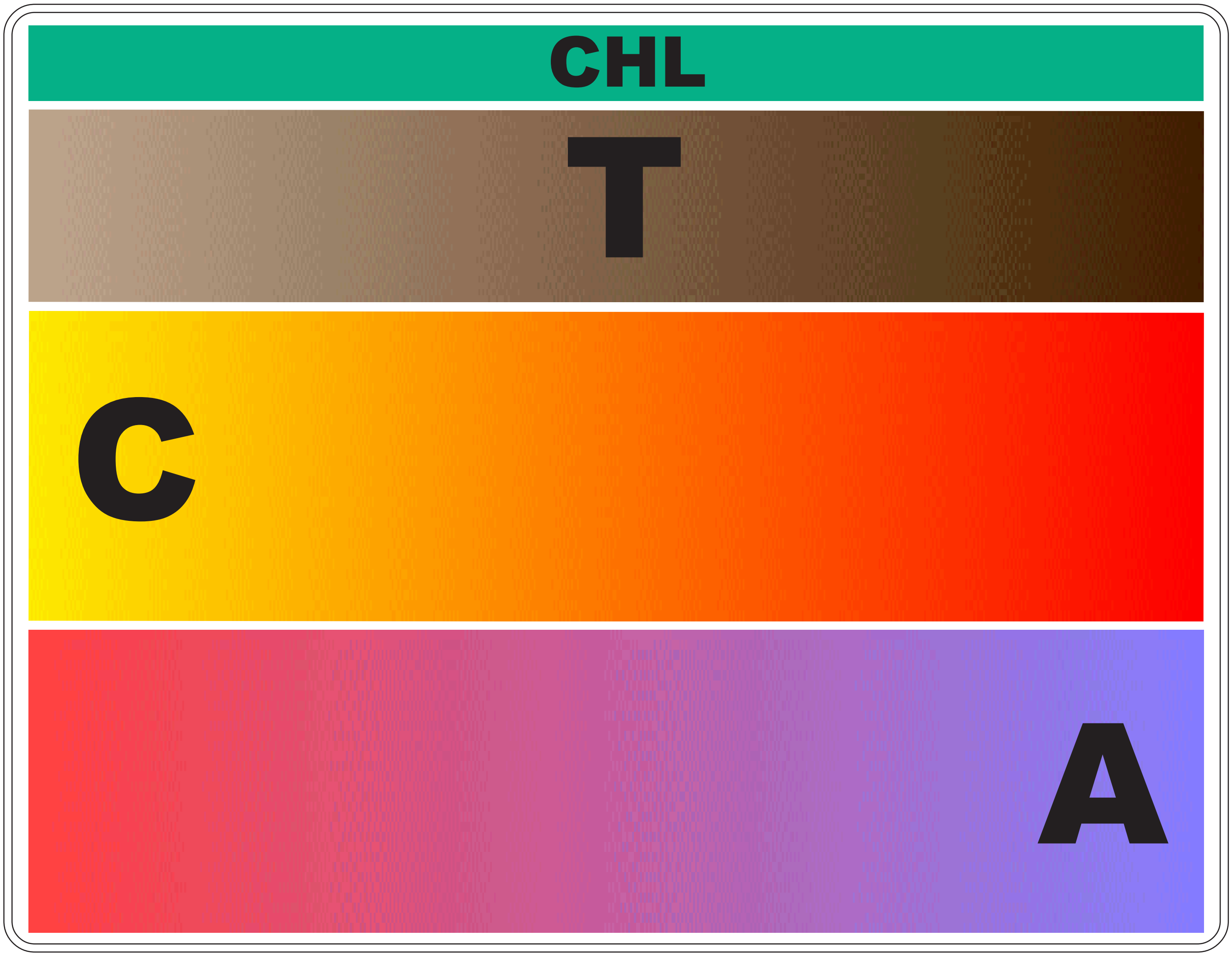
Manual Of Fall Tree Color Development

Dr. Kim D. Coder, Professor of Tree Biology & Health Care / University Hill Fellow
University of Georgia Warnell School of Forestry & Natural Resources



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Introduction

Trees have many strategies for life. Some grow fast and die young, others grow slow and live a long time. Some trees colonize new soils and new space, while other trees survive and thrive in the midst of old forests. A number of trees invest in leaves which survive several growing seasons, while other trees grow new leaves every growing season. One of the most intriguing and beautiful result of tree life strategies is autumn leaf coloration among deciduous trees.

An eco-centric human might imagine tree leaves change colors just for a visual feast. But, what is seen as Fall coloration is a planned passage to rest by temperate region trees avoiding liabilities of Winter. In human terms, we are allowed to witness trees getting ready for a quiet phase to assure a Spring filled with opportunities for growth.

Why?

Why do trees express colors in Fall? Research has suggested many reasons over many years. The most enduring and tested reasons for Fall color include five groups of research citations. These cited reasons for autumn color are listed here in order of importance as assessed through the scientific literature.

1) A by-product of the senescence process as trees prepare to enter a quiet phase of life over Winter.

2) A sunscreen and filter for both ultraviolet and visible wavelengths of light protecting the reabsorption of valuable materials back into the tree from a leaf.

3) As antioxidant protection for photosynthesis machinery and associated life processes as they are systematically closed down for the season.

4) Helping regulate osmotic changes in a senescing leaf minimizing damage from drought and frost.

5) An environmental signal (coevolution) to pests to minimize infestation.

Location!

Autumn coloration changes seen in temperate zone trees at the end of a growing season move from North to South in the Northern Hemisphere, and from South to North in the Southern Hemisphere. Earth's North-South mountain ranges in temperate zones with continental climates accentuate tree color potential (i.e. temperate Andies, temperate Eastern Australia, and Western and Eastern North America). There are only a few places where all the conditions and trees come together in a perfect combination to generate the shock and awe of fantastic autumn colors.

Different forest types have different sets of trees growing along altitudinal (high / low) and moisture (wet / dry) gradients. Some forest types are highly diverse over short distances and in pockets, while other are monotypic across large landscape areas. Forests with a number of different deciduous trees tend to present colors well. Forests with large numbers of evergreen species are limited in color development at the landscape and forest level. Figure 1 ranks the main forest types by Fall color presentation with #1 tending to be the strongest and most intense color in any given year. Color is expressed over landscape, forest, stand, species and individual tree level, all differing from season to season. In autumn, there are always individual trees and pockets of trees which color-up.

Due to the diversity of deciduous tree species, density of multi-storied and multi-successional forests, and great topographical and climatic variation all across a long distance, Eastern North America is one of the places on Earth for a great tree color show. Fall sends tree color presentation rolling down the Appalachians, flowing Southward until fading into live oak, evergreen bay, and pine forests of Coastal Georgia and Florida, and the predominant evergreen maritime forests of the Gulf Coast. At the Southern end of the Appalacians, many South-flowing river valleys carry some color development further into the lower Coastal Plain.

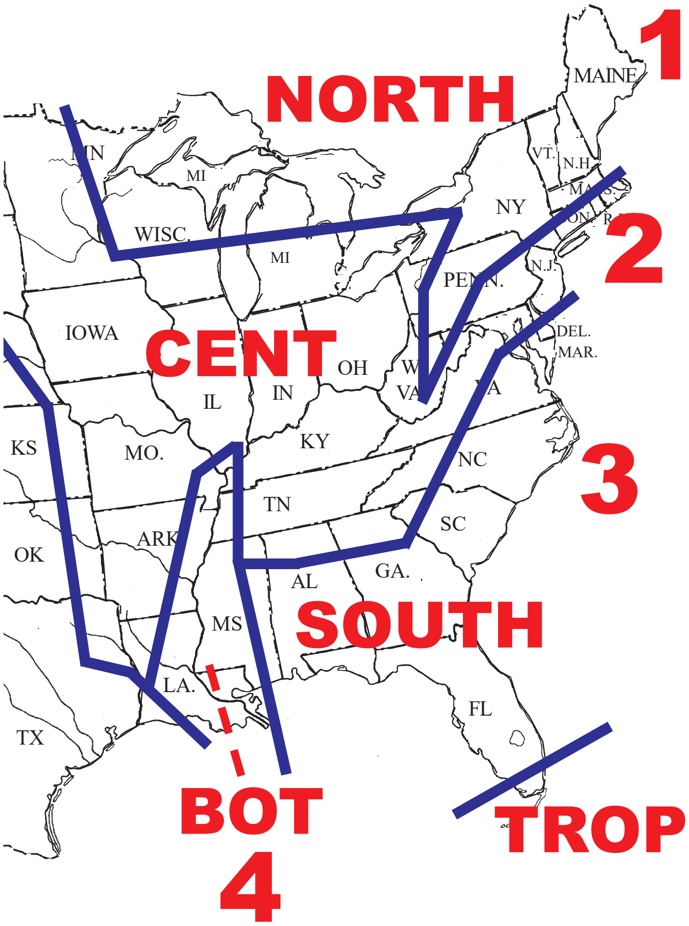
Pioneer or Climax

Successional status of tree species impacts color expression. Early successional tree species, like willow and cottonwood, tend to begin leaf senescence within the crown in more inefficient leaves. Interior crown color expression is shaded and muted by outer leaves. Outer crown leaves can be quite colorful but with a limited pallet. Outer leaves on early successional species tend to generate few stress initiated pigments like anthocyanins, and tend to stay green until killed by frosts, browning-out quickly. A notable exception is sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*).

Late successional species, like white oak, tend to begin senescence around the outer portions of their crowns. These species generate many more stress pigments and maintain colored pigments in leaves well into Fall and Winter, even after leaf drop. Late successional species are considered to be more conserving of essential elements and more effective at reabsorbing nutrients, compared with early successional species. Late successional species tend to have a more colorful and longer shut-down process than most early successional species.

Rest & Resurrection Signal

Colors of tree rest and impending leaf death have been celebrated or treated as a warning by people through millennia. In order to better understand Fall colors tree life components must be reviewed including senescence, pigments, abscision, and tree color expression across a landscape. These components will be subject areas covered in the rest of this manual.



BOT = bottomland hardwoods -- cottonwood, gum, baldcypress, bottomland oak

CENT = central hardwoods -- upland oak, maple, cherry, yellow poplar, walnut

NORTH = Northern hardwoods -- maple, beech, birch

SOUTH = Southern oaks & pines -- yellow pine, Southern oak, sweetgum

TROP = tropical hardwoods -- mangrove, mahogany

Figure 1: Simplified distribution of major forest types in the Eastern United States numbered in order of strong color presentation. (#1 = strongest Fall colors)

Color Symptoms -- Senescence

Spring flower colors climb in Fall to the crowns of trees. Many of the pigments are the same, but the colored containers have changed from dainty petals to coarse, broad leaves. It is living leaves that reveal in their decline and fall last summer's results and next spring's promise. The living process in a tree generating autumn colors is called senescence.

Autumn coloration in trees is a symptom of deciduous leaf senescence. Senescence is an organized, planned, and essential part of tree life. Senescence is a process of closing down, reallocating resources, and sealing off a leaf. There are both environmental events and genetic switches which signal trees to commence senescence. Evolutionary time has selected for internal seasonal calenders and sensors which track day lengths and minimum temperatures in native trees.

Endings & Beginnings

Senescence is a planned decommissioning process established with leaf formation. Inside the leaf, as photosynthesis began to generate food from carbon-dioxide, light, water and a few soil elements, a growth regulation timer was started ending in Winter dormancy. The fullness of Summer production helps establish dormancy patterns, as dormancy processes establish allocations for the next growing season.

Tree genetic materials have been crafted to minimize tree liability over the impending bad growth period of Winter. Fall color expression is a sign of this process. Leaf senescence is initiated when shortened warm days, and decreasing but not freezing nighttime temperatures are recognized by leaves and buds of a deciduous tree. Daylength and daily minimum average temperature are the most direct signals related to tree color expression. Atypical climatic events, and trees planted out of their native neighborhood, can lead to severe problems for tree survival and accelerate or modify normal color expression. Trees in better health tend to express colors more brightly, which could influence pest recognition of suitable hosts.

Save The Good Stuff!

In senescence, a tree recalls valuable resources on-loan to leaves, and then enter a resting life stage. Tree roots continue at a slower pace to colonize and control space, and gather resources, waiting for better conditions. Frosts and freezing temperatures kill living cells in tree leaves. Dead cells cannot conserve and transport materials back into a tree, and so do not produce colored pigments as a by-product. Temperature-killed leaves, which have not started to senesce, are a sign many tree resources were unable to be recalled and now lie outside a tree in falling leaves.

A primary task of senescence processes are to remobilize and reabsorb valuable resources used for food production during the past growing season. Key among these valuable resources are essential elements nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, magnesium, and sulfur. In order to remove these elements from deciduous leaves for future use, they must have their physiological cages dismantled, and each must be placed into a transport form.

These essential elements are pulled back into twigs behind and below senescing leaves. Any residual starch supplies (CHO = tree food) in a leaf are broken down into constituent sugars and removed. This break-down does require energy to accomplish. A leaf is cleaned out of valuable mobile or transportable materials before it is sealed-off for good. Generally, the brighter the colors, the more vigorous a tree and the better food production was in the past growing season.

Losing Leaves

The central physiological purpose of a deciduous leaf is to support light energy capture and food production machinery within a disposable unit. Chief among this machinery, and accounting for a huge amount of production and maintenance resources, is chlorophyll. Chlorophyll is an antenna which receives and absorbs energy from specific wavelengths of sunlight. Chlorophyll absorbs select red and blue wavelengths of light and reflects green light. It is attached in dense arrays on specialized membranes within leaf cells. Cells with a full supply of chlorophyll molecules are dense with all of life's resources and sport a deep green color.

Green Is Life

To better appreciate new and unmasked colors of Fall, consider the color of tree life -- green. The green color comes from a large, hard-to-maintain and expensive to build molecule with a magnesium atom held by four nitrogen atoms in its center called chlorophyll. Chlorophyll is the most precious of molecules. The tree conserves, protects, and maintains chlorophyll. With failing light, food, elements or energy, loss of chlorophyll pigments are a first visible sign of problems. Yellowing or chlorosis in trees is a symptom of many different pests and environmental impacts, because chlorophyll production and maintenance is so sensitive to damage.

Trees do not manufacture chlorophyll until well illuminated. In healthy but unlighted tissues, a good supply of colorless chlorophyll components (requiring iron (Fe) to make) are kept in storage. Until there is light to capture, chlorophyll is not produced. After leaf tissues are exposed to light, the pale yellowish tissue colors are cloaked by the green of chlorophyll. Chlorophyll is clearly visible and concentrated in leaves. Chlorophylls are also found in most near-surface tissues in a tree exposed to light. The inner bark of twigs (secondary cortex), light-exposed roots, and inner portions of buds all possess chlorophyll.

De-Greening

As day length wains, chlorophyll becomes harder to maintain at peak efficiency. Sensor input from the leaf and basal bud signal senescence process genes to be switched on. As autumn is approached, expensive and high maintenance chlorophylls are not as rapidly repaired every day as in full Summer.

With changing resource availabilities (like light quantity and quality), chlorophyll production and maintenance declines rapidly. The preliminary steps needed to make chlorophyll are slowed and stopped by low temperatures, regulation signals generated from the tree's light sensors, and a build-up of photosynthesis by-products. At the same time, longer dark periods, cool temperatures and bright sunlight, help initiate chlorophyll demolition. Drought conditions can accentuate chlorophyll loss. The green curtains in a leaf begins to withdraw. Chlorophylls begin to be degraded, dismantled, and component parts shipped out of a leaf.

Leaf starch or stored food, begins to be rapidly broken apart and shipped out of a leaf. What chlorophyll remains, continues to generate energy gradients used to power remaining living cells. The products being shipped from leaves are having a more difficult time escaping through the developing abscision zone in the leaf's stem base. More sugars and mobile elements are unbound in transport and production cells. These conditions lead to chlorophyll loss when leaf energy concentrations are still relatively high. Figure 2.

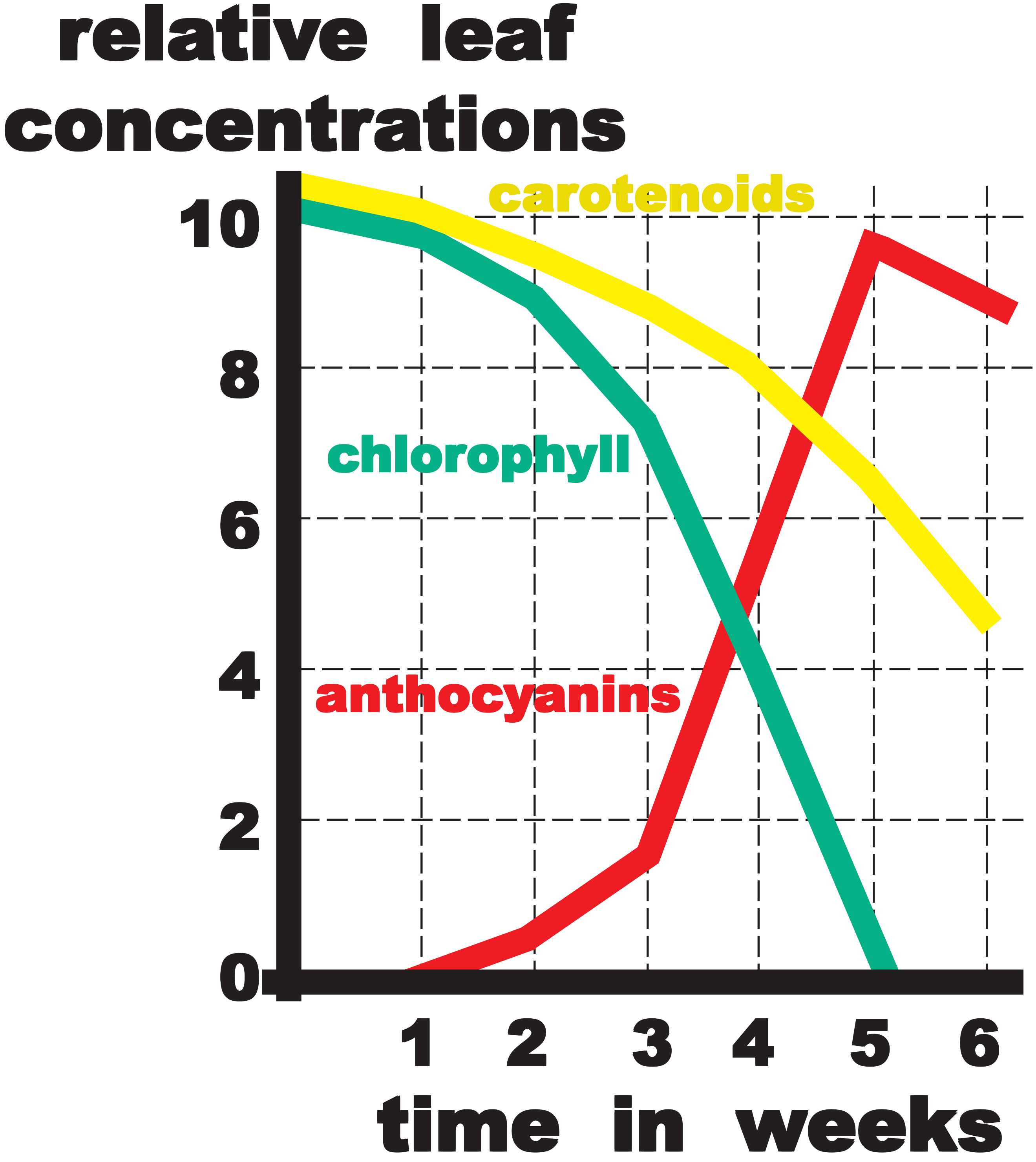


Figure 2: Relative change in primary tree leaf pigment concentrations over a Fall senescence period.
(partially derived from Matile 2000)

Revealed Colors

Chlorophyll veils slowly drop away and reveal a great pallet of colors, some brand new to this autumn and some having lain hidden all season. One of the tough pigments which shares chlorophyll's cellular containers, are red, orange and yellow carotenoids. These pigments were made to shield and protect chlorophylls, but now can be clearly seen.

Carotenoids can act as small antennas capturing selected light wavelengths and blocking high light intensities which would damage chlorophyll. Carotenoids also help dissipate energy unusable by cellular machinery. These bright pigments act as antioxidants for a leaf. As chlorophylls are decommissioned into colorless components, carotenoids are finally revealed. At the beginning of senescence, leaves begin to appear less medium and dark green, and more yellow-green in color.

New Colors

With bright Fall sunshine and low temperatures, the photosynthetic system becomes progressively more inhibited and inefficient. The lower the temperature, the more inhibited energy capture and food production become. But senescence requires energy to function, and photosynthesis and other cellular processes must be continued at some diminished level. In order to protect dwindling and sensitive machinery of leaf cells, new pigments are generated which function as sun-blocks and selective filters to prevent too much light of too short of wavelength from impacting living cells. New carotenoids are also produced to help in senescence.

As chlorophyll contents fall to about half their normal Summer concentration, flavonoids are generated. The largest component of all these new pigments generated are anthocyanins. Anthocyanin concentrations are controlled by environmental stress. Too much or too little light, low but not freezing temperatures, rich sugar contents in leaf cells, essential element shortages, and drought all help facilitate production of new anthocyanins. Anthocyanins are attached to sugars and dissolved in the water solution of a leaf cell. Anthocyanins also provide limited antifreeze protection for leaves.

Driven Into Winter

Fall color expression is controlled by the pace of chlorophyll decline, degree of carotenoid retention past chlorophyll extinction, anthocyanin synthesis rate, and formation of dark oxidation products (phenolics). Environmental conditions which inhibit photosynthesis tend to accelerate chlorophyll decline, reveal and generate more carotenoids, and increase formation of anthocyanins. Bright sunlight, shorter daylengths, drought conditions and cooling daytime and nighttime temperatures tend to generate more color expression. Figure 3.

Eventually, freezing temperatures and decay organisms kill or isolate remaining living cells in a leaf. Cells begin to self destruct, chemically burning the last remnants of cellular components into the "tars" of death.

Failing Connections

The final step in senescence is a leaf being sealed off from the rest of a tree. A weak zone at the leaf base is initiated when normal growth control messages and supply of food materials moving out of a leaf are reduced. Shorter days, longer cool nights, and changing light quality help throw internal genetic switches which change growth regulators and food allocation patterns. The tree begins to build a physical and chemical seal across several layers of living cells near the leaf stem base. On the leaf side of the seal, cell walls are weakened and become thinner. Across this basal zone of change, the living connections between food transport cells (phloem) become more tenuous.

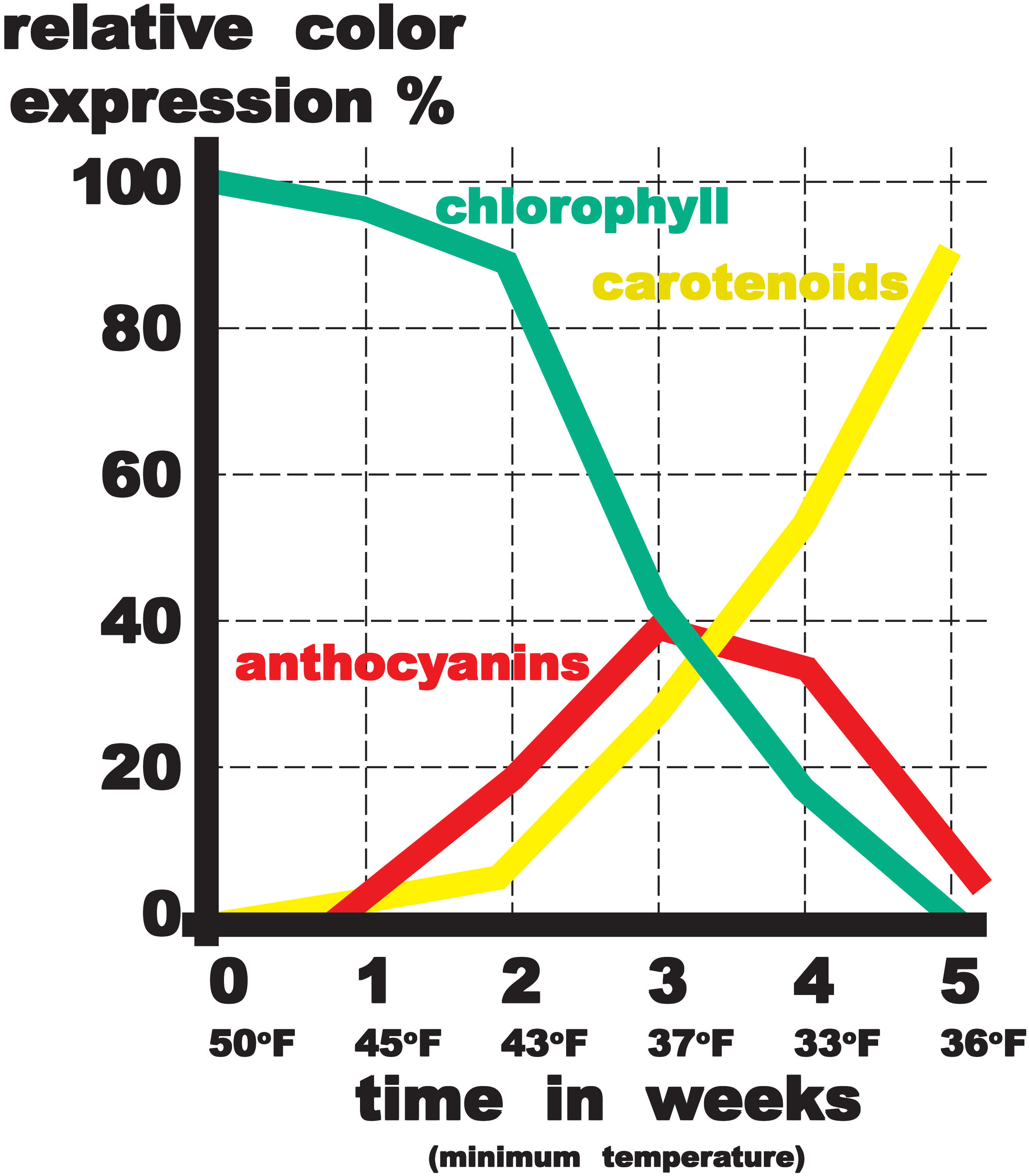


Figure 3: Relative color expression changes in sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*) trees in NE United States over one senescence period. (after Schaberg et.al. 2003)

Water connection (xylem) cells continue to supply water to replace evaporative losses in a leaf. These water supply cells are part of strong but dead connective strands within the leaf stem. As a leaf blows in the wind and is loaded by rain, the leaf stem starts to tear at its weakest point, the leaf-stem-base. As leaf-stem-base cells weaken, internal pressure causes them to swell more than surrounding cells. This mechanical strain causes one living cell to shear away from its neighbors. This zone of separation, or abscission zone, is a design feature of many mature tree leaves.

Falling Leaves

A point is reached when all living cell connections are broken at the leaf-stem-base and only the dead water connections hold a leaf onto the tree. Only a little bit of force is needed to snap these connections and a leaf will fall to the ground. A single Fall wind storm can sweep colors from the trees. The wound left on the tree (a leaf scar), sometimes highly characteristic of a given species, is the outward face of a constructed barrier wall established to keep the environment outside. The tree is now fortified against Winter.

The artistic pallet of tree colors in falling leaves can be diverse. Carotenoids are like bright oil paints. The always variable anthocyanins are like watercolors, blending across a tree covered landscape. Behind all these colors remain the deep browns of tannins (the color of tea) and the basic light browns of tree tissues. The number of different color combinations is almost infinite. In some forests, all the colors contrast with evergreen trees. The colors in deciduous leaves eventually fade to brown, the color of the earth.

Designer Colors -- Summary

Senescence is the pre-planned and orderly dismantling of light gathering structures and machinery inside a leaf. Part of senescence is development of a structurally weak zone at the base of a leaf stock or petiole. Live cells are needed in a leaf to unmask, manufacture, and maintain tree pigments we appreciate as autumn colors. Fall coloration is a result of this positive life process in a tree. Freezing temperatures kill leaves and stop the senescence process with only decay remaining.

Tree Pigment Palette

The palette of potential colors is as diverse as the natural world. Climate-induced senescence processes which trees use to pass into their Winter rest period can present many colors. Colored pigments produced by trees can be generally divided into green drapes of tree life, bright oil paints, subtle water colors, and sullen earth tones.

Unveiling

Overpowering greens of Summer foliage come from chlorophyll pigments. Green colors can hide and dilute other colors. As chlorophyll contents decline in Fall, other pigments are revealed or produced in tree leaves. As different pigments are fading, being produced, or changing inside leaves, a host of dynamic color changes result. Taken altogether, various coloring agents can yield an almost infinite combination of leaf colors. Primary colorants of Fall tree leaves are carotenoid and flavonoid pigments mixed over a variable brown background.

There are many tree colors. Bright, long lasting oil paint-like colors are carotene pigments producing intense red, orange, and yellow. A chemical associate of carotenes are xanthophylls which produce yellow and tan colors. Short-lived, highly variable watercolor-like colors are anthocyanin pigments producing soft red, pink, purple and blue-ish. Tannins are common water soluble colorants that produce medium and dark browns. The base color of tree leaf components are light brown. In some tree leaves there are pale cream colors and blueing agents which impact color expression. Figure 4.

Perceiving Fall

A forest landscape and trees have five major pigment color sets which can define autumn colors. (Figure 5) These tree pigments have chemical structures which modify light as it passes bye or is reflected away. Some wavelengths of light are absorbed by these pigments due to physical and chemical properties. Each pigment has a single or several peak wavelengths of light which are absorbed, with the rest of the wavelengths relatively unimpacted.

Humans see unabsorbed wavelengths of light in the visual spectrum as a dominant color. Color can only be observed by a human in the visible spectrum wavelengths of roughly 380nm (violet) to 730nm (red). Wavelength number is a measure taken in nanometers (nm), or a billionth of an meter. People with modified color vision (various types of “color-blindness”) will still register light across the visible wavelengths but not always perceive a color, or the same color as everyone else. Color is truly in the eye, mind, and genes of the beholder.

Describing Colors

Tree Fall leaf colors can be categorized into 15 Coder Leaf Color Code values. These values are a numeric code defining general color expression in autumn tree leaves. Figure 6.

-Primary colors of autumn trees are green (1), yellow (3), orange (5), red (7), and purple (9).
-Each primary tree color can combine to yield secondary colors of green-yellow (2),
    yellow-orange (4), orange-red (6), red-purple (8), and purple-blue (10).
-Each primary tree color can also be modified by browning (B).
-All color descriptions / coding can also be further modified along gradients of
    light (L) / dark (A), and of intense (I) / dull (U).

Figure 4: Graphical color expression range of the three major pigment groups in Fall senescing trees. Note white/cream color blending and brightening agents will impact color expression, as will chlorophyll green.

1. **Chlorophylls**
2. **Carotenoids**
   - **A. Carotenes**
   - **B. Xanthophylls**
3. **Flavonoids**
   - **A. Flavones & Flavonols**
   - **B. Anthocyanins**
   - **C. Proanthocyanidins**
     (condensed tannins)
4. **Tannins**
   (sugared tannins)
5. **Betalins**
   (betacyanins & betaxanthins)

Figure 5: Pigments groups responsible for major color expression in trees during Fall senescence.

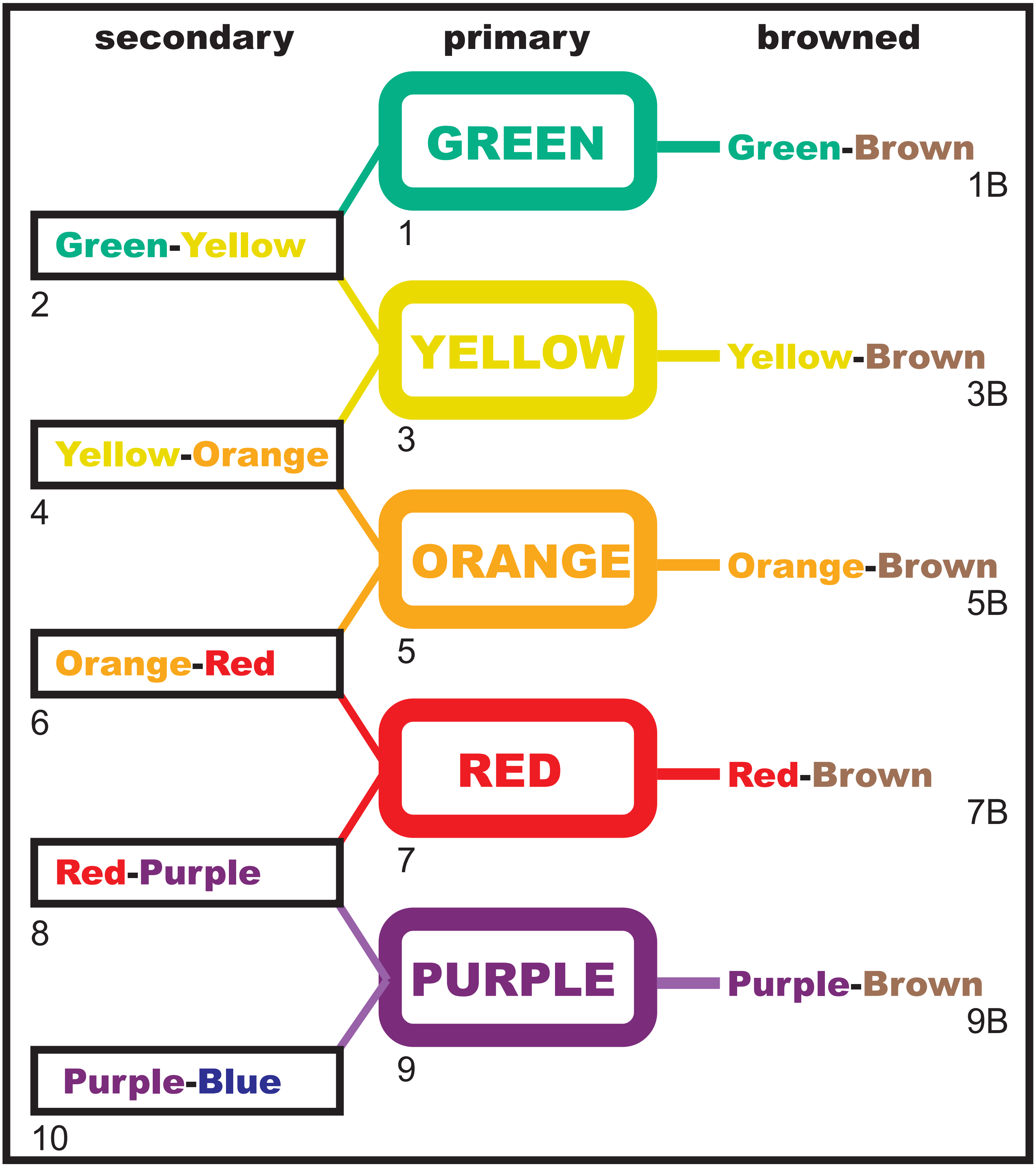


Figure 6: Primary, seconday, and browned autumn tree colors with associated Coder Leaf Color Code values.

Each color modified by light (L) / dark (A), & intense (I) / dull (U).

Chlorophyll Green

Chlorophylls are green colored pigments seen in tree leaves. Chlorophyll is the centerpiece (literally and figuratively) of light capture and food production in trees. Chlorophyll is bound to special membranes inside chloroplasts within leaf cells. Chloroplasts are transformed through senescence into gerontaplasts, or aged chloroplasts with declining chlorophyll maintenance machinery. Chlorophyll has a medium green color (it absorbs red and blue wavelengths of light) and is produced in such quantities as to dominate or mask other leaf pigments.

Chlorophyll is a light gathering antenna consisting of a porphyrin ring “head” structure with a magnesium atom center, and a long phytol “tail” (tetrapyrrole). It is chemically similar to the iron containing heme pigment of animal blood, and to vitamin B12. Chlorophyll is expensive for tree cells to make, difficult to maintain, and easily torn apart by far blue and ultraviolet light. In most tree leaf cells, a chlorophyll molecule only exists for an average of 26 hours, depending upon the biological environment of the leaf. Chlorophyll is only produced when leaf tissues are stimulated by light.

A’s & B’s

The two types of chlorophyll in trees are called chlorophyll “a” (chla) and chlorophyll “b” (chlb). Chlorophyll b differs from chlorophyll a by having an additional double bonded oxygen atom attached to one corner, making chlb absorb slightly different wavelengths of light than chla. Chlb is called the shade chlorophyll and chla is called the full sun chlorophyll, even though both are present in any tree leaf with only the proportion of molecules changing. For example, the chla / chlb ratio in shaded tree leaves is about 2.5, where this ratio is about 4.2 in full sun leaves, on average.

If light excites chlorophyll, the light energy captured can be quickly stolen by cellular machinery and used to make food. If chlorophyll is excited by light and can not quickly hand-off energy to other cellular machinery, a highly reactive form of oxygen and peroxide can be generated which disrupt and destroy cell membranes. Tree leaf cells have several means for protecting chlorophyll molecules, and for quenching any misdirected energy to minimize internal damage. Several types of colored pigments assist in this process. Some of these protective pigments are revealed as Fall leaf colors.

Killing Chlorophyll

In senescence, chlorophyll is detoxified and broken-down. This process occurs along a material conserving pathway. Chlorophyll b is converted to chlorophyll a providing a spike of chlorophyll a and slightly changing leaf color to a darker green. Sometimes this deepening green color can be noticed just before yellowing begins in late Summer / early Fall. Figure 7. Next the long phytol tail is cut-off chlorophyll followed by the magnesium atom being liberated and shipped away. Finally, the large ring structure (porphyrin) of the chlorophyll head is straightened out. All these now colorless building blocks of chlorophyll are stored, further broken down, and shipped out of the leaf.

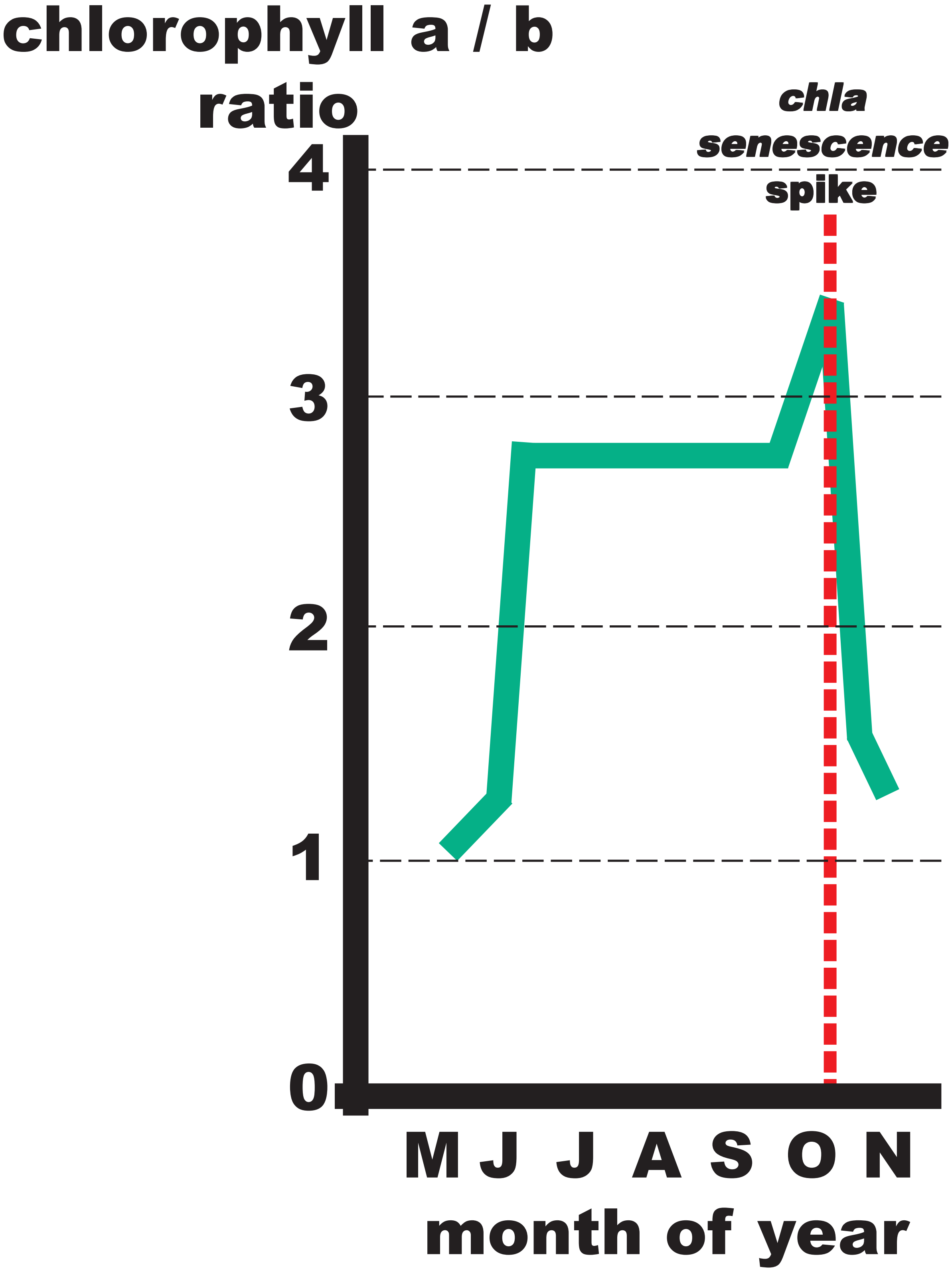


Figure 7: Change of chlorophyll ratio *(chla / chlb)* in mixed oak leaves over time. (from Sanger, 1971)

Carotenoid Oil Paints

Carotenoids (isoprenoids / tetra-terpenes) are some of the most common pigments made by plants and microbes, and stolen by animals. Carotenoids were discovered in 1831, and found to be essential to plants and always found in tree leaves. Carotenoids are non-nitrogen containing, fat-soluble pigments held on membranes inside plastids, either with chlorophyll (in chloroplasts) or by themselves (in chromoplasts). Carotenoids are represented by more than 700 unique pigments - each presenting a slightly different color.

Carotenoids are tough, “oil paint-like” pigments which are found in familiar everyday things such as the color of carrots, corn, bananas, egg yolks, and butter. Animals conserve and use a number of the carotenoids in their own coloration. Some chickens are fed yellow carotenoids to produce a pleasing golden-yellow skin color. To see a common set of carotenoid pigments, just lay a piece of cardboard over green grass for a few days. The grass will lose its chlorophyll, leaving the yellow of carotenoids behind.

Tough Color

Carotenoids are built with forty carbons strung together and are called tetraterpenes (40C). Other important plant materials come from this same chemical line including the sesquiterpene (15C) abscisic acid (ABA), and many types of diterpene (20C) gibberellic acids. Both groups are important plant growth regulators. Carotenoids all share a long carbon chain structure which has alternating single and double carbon bonds (conjugated) with or without two types of terminal rings or loops.

Carotenoids are energy-expensive for a tree to manufacture and not easily broken apart. Unlike chlorophylls which are only manufactured or maintained when light is present, carotenoids can be generated in the dark. Carotenoids do more than just add color, they play three critical functions within tree leaves: blocking excessive light from sensitive chlorophyll systems; harvesting light beyond chlorophyll wavelengths; and, quenching energy paths leading to free radicals.

Light Antenna

The light capturing and processing machinery in a tree are dependent upon chlorophyll. Carotenoids help protect the light gathering system of trees from overexposure to light especially blocking some blue and violet light which damage chlorophyll molecules. Carotenoids, being more stable and tougher than chlorophyll, helps shield valuable but fragile chlorophyll. In other words, carotenoids function as a sunscreen in leaves.

Carotenoids act as antenna for capturing certain wavelengths of light. Because carotenoids and chlorophylls are attached on membranes close to each other, the carotenoids can easily transfer any captured energy to chlorophyll molecules. This “accessory pigment” role for carotenoids help to funnel more energy to chlorophylls to process. Alternatively, when chlorophyll captures energy and can not quickly pass it onto surrounding energy conserving machinery, carotenoids can remove this energy, preventing chlorophyll damage. Carotenoids vent energy away, disposing of extra energy as heat. If not vented away, unused energy would generate damaging oxygen radicals.

Anti-Oxidant

Probably the most important role for carotenoids in a tree is preventing light powered oxidation (destruction) of chlorophyll, surrounding molecules, and membranes by oxygen radicals. This type of oxidation can be extremely damaging to the light capture system and individual cells in a leaf. Carotenoids function as an anti-photo-oxidant. Anywhere in the tree where there is chlorophyll, light, and oxygen, carotenoids are pre-positioned to help protect light gathering systems from damage. Figure 8.

With & Without Oxygen

Carotenoid pigments comes in two forms, non-oxygenated forms called carotenes and oxygenated (alcohol) forms called xanthophylls. The pigment color expressed by carotenes and xanthophylls depend upon light wavelengths absorbed as shown in Figure 9. Most carotenoids have three closely clustered light absorption peaks which cover an absorption range averaging roughly 70nm wide.

Carotenoids brightly color many tree parts with red, orange and yellow. The amount of carotenoids present in leaves is roughly one-twelfth the amount of chlorophyll present at the beginning of senescence. Xanthophylls comprise roughly 66-75% of all carotenoids in a leaf. Carotenoids usually outlive chlorophyll pigments by 3-5 weeks in Fall tree leaves. New carotenoid pigments are also manufactured as leaf, light, and temperature conditions change.

Carotene Orange

Carotenes range in color from bright oil-paint-like yellow, orange, red-orange, and red. They are pigments coloring oranges, tomatoes, carrots, pineapples, citrus, paprika, apples, saffron stigmas, strawberry, yams, mangoes, apricots, peaches, sweet potatoes, and pumpkins. The carotenes are long carbon chains with two, one or no carbon loops on their ends, like all carotenoids. For example, lycopene (pinkish-red) helps generate the bright red color of tomatoes and has no terminal loops.

A carotene with one terminal beta loop on the carbon chain is called a gamma form (a pink pigment and precursor to beta-carotene). A long chain of carbons with two identical beta loops on each end is called the beta form (orange colored beta-carotene). The delta form (yellow-orange pigment) has one alpha loop on its carbon chain (precursor to alpha-carotene). Two alpha loops on each end of the carbon chain is the alpha form (alpha-carotene, a yellow pigment).

Every tree species and individual may generate different amounts of different carotenes. Each carotene differs every so slightly from its chemical family members, but these small differences change light reflectance and so color expressed. Generally, beta-carotene is most common in chloroplasts and lycopene is most common in chromoplasts. Both gamma-carotene and alpha-carotene are precursors to vitamin A (20C), a product of a split carotene and essential for animals.

Reflected Colors

Carotenes serve to protect chlorophyll from too much or wrong wavelengths of light, and so act as a selective filter. Chla has general light absorption peaks around 670nm and 430nm. Chlb has general light absorption peaks around 640nm and 460nm, just inside the chla peaks allowing it to be more efficient in the shade of chla. Beta-carotene (orange) has absorption peaks between 420nm and 480nm, shielding chlorophyll from too much light at the blue end of the spectrum.

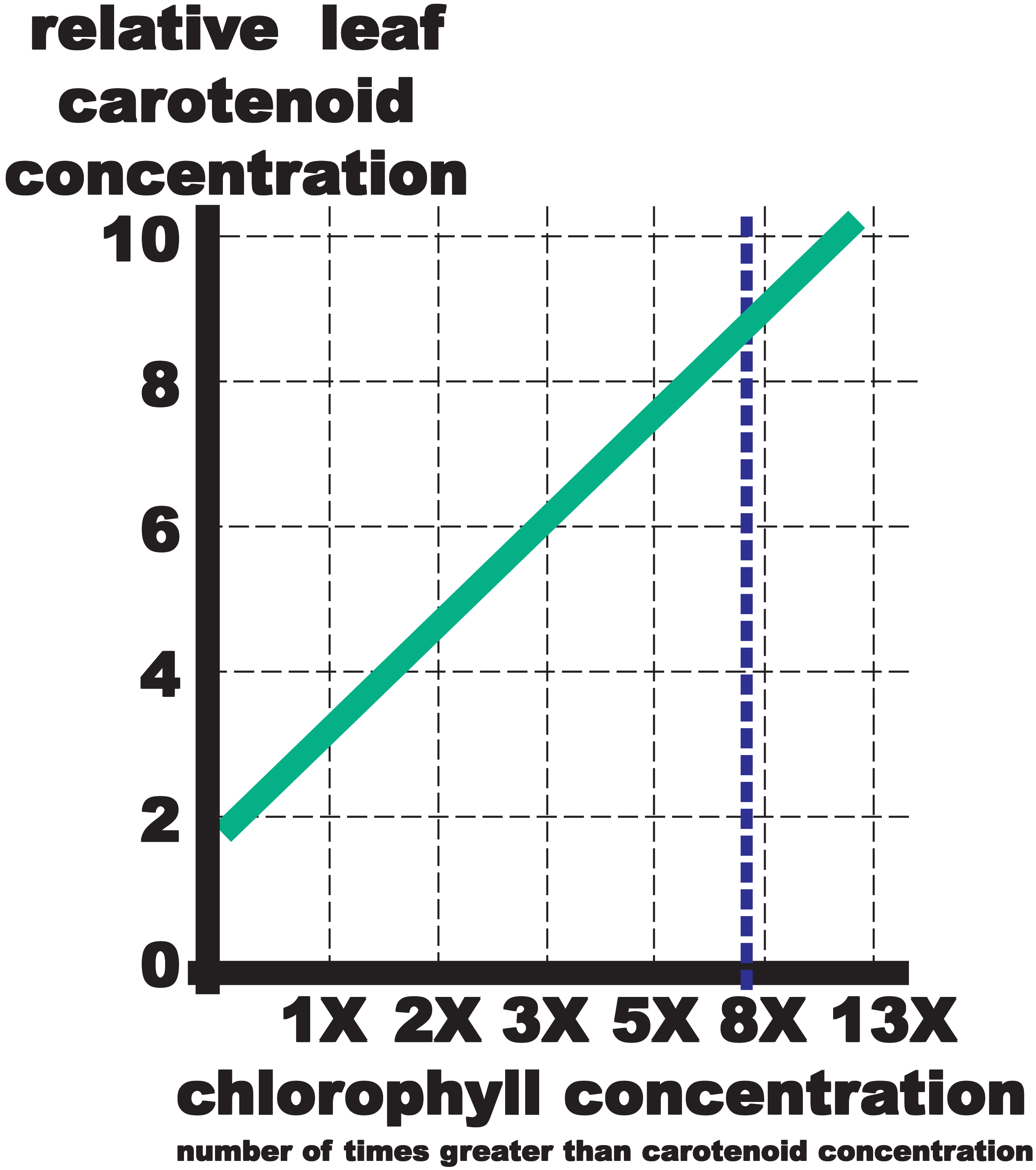


Figure 8: Estimated relative chlorophyll concentrations compared with carotenoid concentrations in tree leaves. Left of the bold dashed line are senescence levels of chlorophyll. (derived from Lee et.al. 2003)

Select Carotenoids

color expressed	average absorption peak	absorption range
clear / colorless	--	<360
pale yellow	400	378-425
yellow	443	414-475
yellow-orange	451	421-488
orange	455	432-490
pink	469	435-505
red	494nm	451-540nm

Figure 9: Color expressed, average peak absorption wavelength (nm), and primary absorption wavelength range (nm) for a variety of carotene and xanthophyll pigments.

Every carotene theoretically, due to the long chain of carbons, can exist chemically as many hundreds of different isomers (i.e. 1,056 isomers for lycopene; 272 isomers for beta-carotene). In the tree, only one or two isomers usually exist. Extracting carotenes from tree cells usually disrupts and changes the isomer mix. The most common of the carotenes include pro-lycopene (orange), lycopene (pinkish-red), neuroporene (yellow), torlene (red), tetradehydrolycopene (red), zeta-carotene (pale yellow), gamma-carotene (pink), delta-carotene (yellowish orange), beta-carotene (orange), and alpha-carotene (yellow). There has been a number of positive human health values associated with consumption of many of the carotenes.

Xanthophyll Yellow

Xanthophyll (phylloxanthin) pigments were discovered in plants in 1837. As mentioned above, xanthophylls are oxygenated carotenoids. Xanthophylls are more strongly bound to cell membranes and more polar chemically than carotene carotenoids. Light is not needed to initiate or maintain xanthophyll pigments. Xanthophylls generate yellow, gold, yellow-tan, and yellow-orange colors in trees. They are found pigmenting marigold petals, citrus, peaches, nectarines, and papayas. The bright red of peppers are from capsanthin and capsorubin, unique red xanthophylls with modified end loops on each molecule. Animals can not generate xanthophylls and must utilize ingested plant pigments for coloration of feathers, egg yolks, and eye color, for example.

Cycling Up Protection

Xanthophylls are an important component of the light harvesting machinery in tree leaf chloroplasts. They absorb light in wavelengths which chlorophylls can not, and pass captured energy to primary chlorophyll reactions centers. Xanthophylls also serve a photo-protective role, protecting other tissues and the photosynthesis process from overexposure to light by acting as a filter of blue spectrum light and actively dissipating extra energy captured but not used. A part of this specialized progressive protective process is called the xanthophyll cycle.

In tree leaf cells much of the xanthophyll in the morning is in the form of a large violaxanthin pigment pool within plastids. As light intensity and ultraviolet light increases, violaxanthin (yellow) is converted to antheraxanthin (yellow) which provides greater light screening and cell protection. As sunlight intensity peaks, zeaxanthin (orange) is generated from antheraxanthin providing even more protection for photosynthetic machinery. Cells become more acidic at high light intensities which facilitates the quickening of the xanthophyll cycle toward zeaxanthin. Overnight most of the xanthophylls are converted back to violaxanthin. Xanthophylls (specifically zeaxanthin) have also been cited as a blue light sensor for stomate opening in the morning, and for helping tree tissues sense directional differences in lighting, generating phototropism (directional growth response to light).

Naming Names

Some of the xanthophylls include flavoxanthin, rubixanthin, rhodoxanthin, canthaxanthin, zeaxanthin (orange), alpha- and beta-cryptoxanthin (yellow-orange pigments converted to Vitamin A in animals), zeinoxanthin (yellow), fucoxanthin, canthaxanthin, and astaxanthin (red), violaxanthin (yellow), lutein (yellow), neoxanthin (yellow), and antheraxanthin (yellow). Not all xanthophylls are involved with every xanthophyll-cited task within a tree leaf. Violaxanthin and lutein (yellow pigments) help capture light energy for photosynthesis (photosystem II) and dissipate excess energy for chlorophyll. Neoxanthin (yellow) does not capture light nor can it dissipate energy by eliminating energized radicals.

Lycopene (straight-line pinkish-red pigment) is the starting point for both carotenes and xanthophylls using two physiological processes. One process uses lycopene to generate beta-carotene with its two identical end rings eventually forming a number of xanthophylls. The other process generates alpha-carotene with its two different end rings eventually forming the xanthophyll lutein. As in the carotenes, small differences in end rings can change color expression. Lutein (yellow) and zeaxanthin (orange) are the same except for two bonds on one end ring.

Flavonoid Water Colors

There are more than 7,000 flavonoids -- phenolic compounds (having carbon rings) discovered in 1664. Pigment forms are found in angiosperms, especially in fruits and flowers, and in gymnosperms. All are water soluble and found dissolved in the cell vacuole solution. Flavonoids are here divided into two primary tree pigment groups: flavones and flavonols (pale yellow, cream, ivory, white, colorless); and, anthocyanins (dark yellow, orange, red, blue, pink, purple).

Flavo-Pale

Flavones and flavonols (sometimes called the "yellow flavonoids") are unique materials found in small amounts in tree leaves. They absorb selectively in the ultraviolet part of the spectrum, never interfering with photosynthetically active radiation wavelengths. They absorb much farther into the far blue end of the spectrum than anthocyanins. Some generate the yellows (chalcones) and bright yellows (aurones) of flowers. Many are visible to humans only when concentrated, then appearing milky or cloudy. Flavones and flavonols are visible to insects and utilized in some flowers to facilitate insect pollination. The value of flavones and flavonols to tree leaves are as selective light filters, filtering out the damaging UV light while allowing valuable wavelengths into cell machinery.

Some of the colorless flavone and flavonol pigments are maintained in cells and converted into anthocyanins when needed for protection of young tissues or of senescing tissues in Fall. The color expression value of flavones and flavonols are in how other colors are softened or modified. White creamy coloration provides additional depth and breadth for other colors. Colorless flavones and flavonols can form pigment complexes with highly colored anthocyanins and metal ions to form unique colors in a process called copigmentation. Some of the vivid near-blues arise from this process.

Anthocyanin Purple

Anthocyanins (meaning "blue paint" or "blue flower") are one form of water soluble ("watercolor-like") plant pigment discovered in 1913. They are usually concentrated just under the upper epidermis in the palisade parenchyma cells of a leaf. Anthocyanins are stored inside cell vacuoles and sometimes isolated in protein inclusions within vacuoles called anthocyanoplasts. In Fall, anthocyanins are synthesized in leaf cells from a pool of colorless flavonoids in vacuoles. Figure 10. They do not have nitrogen chemical components and so do not interact with nitrogen mobilization in the leaf. Anthocyanins are common in all trees and found in other terrestrial plants. These pigments are not essential to trees but perform many important functions. There are more than 630 anthocyanins known.

Anthocyanins are pigments found in bronzed or dark-leaved trees in Summer. Anthocyanins also color some tree flowers, fruits, and new tissues. The red colored blush of new growth in many trees is the result of anthocyanin pigments. Anthocyanins make cherries, cranberries, and apples red while making grapes, blueberries and plums blue. The range of colors is great, producing dark yellow, orange, red, crimson, scarlet, dark red, blue, violet, pink, purple, burgundy, and purple-red colors. Anthocyanins can also be colorless.

Chameleon Changes

Each anthocyanin does not have a single base color. Color ranges widely depending upon conditions in a cell over the course of a senescence period. Anthocyanins are not stable for long periods

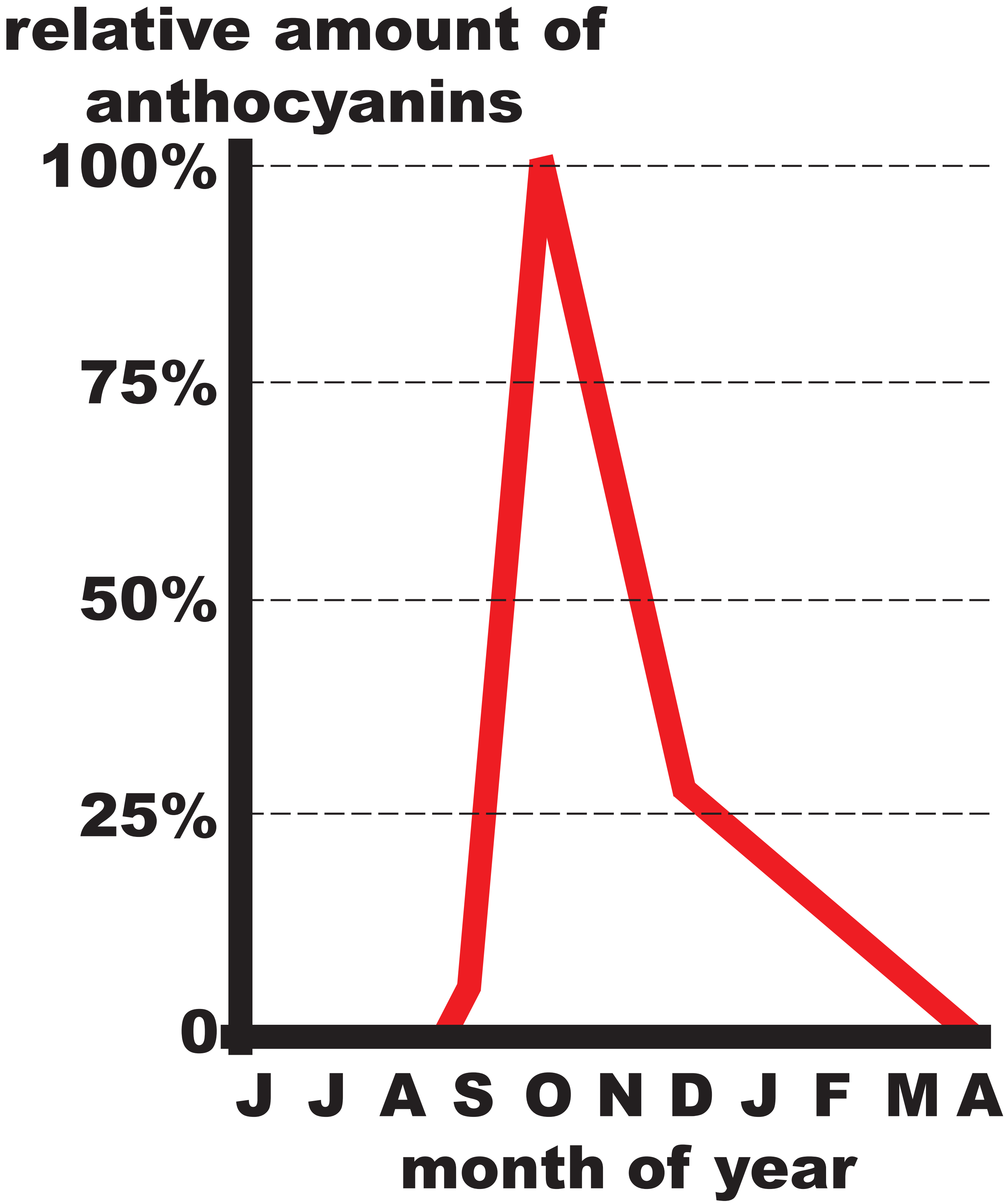


Figure 10: Changes of anthocyanins in oak leaves over time.
(from Sanger, 1971)

dissolved in the cell solution. Anthocyanins change color as cells age. They are sometimes mistaken for water soluble betalain alkaloid pigments found in beet roots, spinach leaves and rhubarb stalks.

Technically, there are two forms in the tree, usually not clearly differentiated: anthocyanins have a sugar attached; anthocyanidins are the pigment rings without a sugar attached. Usually glucose or rhamnose are the sugars comprising an anthocyanin. The sugar attachments make the anthocyanin more water soluble (and osmotically active / water conserving / frost resistive), and shifts the color of the pigment farther toward the blue end of the spectrum. Senescence greatly increased starch breakdown and sugar mobilization. Sugars greatly increasing within leaf cells in Fall include sucrose, fructose and glucose as anthocyanins concentrations peak.

Protective Services

In senescing leaves, anthocyanins serve a protective role. Anthocyanins provide sun-blocking, light filtering, and antioxidant services within leaf tissues containing chlorophyll. They can be induced in tissues by stress (cold, light, pests, element deficiency). Young shoots of Spring and senescing tissues in Fall may be colored with anthocyanins for protection. Summer leaves usually do not generate anthocyanins, but succulent shoots, petioles, and buds may show anthocyanin coloration. Anthocyanins help absorb damaging free radicals generated by inefficient photosynthesis reactions. Anthocyanins also provide limited protection against radiative frost damage while conserving leaf water.

Anthocyanins minimize photo-destruction of cell machinery by blocking damaging wavelengths of light in the 475-575nm wavelength range. Anthocyanins in tree leaves function as "blue blockers," filtering out ultraviolet (UV) light to protect surrounding tissues from UV damage. Anthocyanins are generated following two pathways inside trees -- one initiated by ultraviolet light (UV) light reducing flavones, and one with no light required from a clear material called leuco-anthocyanin. Senescing leaves in full sun generate and maintain anthocyanins to assure successful reabsorption of valuable leaf materials.

Band on the Titanic

Anthocyanins are generated in response to many leaf stress conditions. One stress which initiates anthocyanin production is essential element shortages. Senescence processes in a tree attempt to recover valuable nitrogen, sulfur, potassium, and phosphorus (and other elements) from leaves before leaves are abscised. As element deficiencies develop in a leaf, protective anthocyanins are generated to shelter declining remnants of cell processes and machinery. Senescence is a living tissue process and requires food (CHO) production as fuel. Some waning level of photosynthesis is critical through Fall, and anthocyanins help protect this last food production and remobilization process.

As starch is being dismantled into sugars, and sugars are being transported out of a leaf, anthocyanin content and forms greatly increase. Because anthocyanins are bound to a sugar molecule (the combined unit is called a glycoside) within a cell, sugar supplies are required for anthocyanin production and presentation. In Fall as low temperatures and a developing abscission layer slow material movement out of leaves, sugar enrichment and anthocyanin production result.

Red & Blue States

Every tree and species will have a different combination of anthocyanins generated depending upon genetic and environmental interactions. For example, as senescence of leaves continue into Fall, cells become more acidic. As pH within a leaf becomes more acidic, the same anthocyanins become more red, while a more basic pH in cells (early season cell contents) will generate more blue color expression from the same anthocyanins. The amount and form of iron (Fe) and aluminum (Al) in leaf cells also modify the range of anthocyanin colors.

Anthocyanins have a standard color gradient ranging across dark red, red, orange-red, purple-red, purple, bluish-purple, and near-blue. The chemical modifications which shift color along this color range are summarized in three statements: Figure 11.

1) as chemical attachments to the basic molecule change from OH (hydroxyl) to OCH (methyl), the color expressed becomes more blue;
2) as more small chemical attachments are added to the molecule, the color expressed becomes more blue; and,
3) the more basic cellular pH, the more blue color is expressed.

Variability!

Anthocyanin contents vary greatly from year to year in tree leaves while carotenoids stay relatively constant. Seasonal environmental and biological differences greatly change anthocyanin formation and color expression. Anthocyanin formation is greatly increased by, and color expression is impacted by:

-- leaf deficiency of nitrogen (N), boron (B), sulfur (S), potassium (K), and phosphorus (P);
-- water content (drying);
-- salt content (increasing);
-- starch to sugar conversion rate (accelerating);
-- sugar content (high);
-- ultraviolet (UV) light intensity (bright sunshine);
-- cool temperatures (non-freezing);
-- reduced precipitation (dry weather) causing less leaching of leaf materials;
-- wounding or infection of tissues
-- number of OH and OCH chemical attachments (more blue);
-- presence of chelating metals like aluminum (Al) and iron (Fe) (more blue);
-- presence of flavone or flavonol pigments (clouding and softening);
-- pH of cell vacuole (acid = more red-ish; basic = more blue-ish); and,
-- method of storage and cell shape.

Select Anthocyanins

name	attachments	pH5 acid	pH7 neutral	pH9 basic
pelargonidin	1OH	dark red	orange-red	purple
cyanidin	2OH	red	purple-red	bluish-purple
delphinidin	3OH	purple	bluish-purple	~blue
peonidin	1OH/1OCH	dark red	red	purple-red
petunidin	1OH/2OCH	red	purple-red	~blue

Figure 11: Example of colors expressed for selected anthocyanins with different chemical attachments (OH = hydroxyl group; OCH = methyl group), and at different cellular pH values.

Tannin Khaki

Death of leaf cells form oxidative products which are dark in color (melanins). These brown materials are various forms of phenolics like tannins. Tannins are found within and around leaf cells. Tannin, or tannic acid, was used to tan leather in the past and concentrated from wood and periderm (bark). Tannins are water soluble and help color black tea. Tannins give red wine a darker color and a bitter taste. Tannins can be orange-brown, amber, yellow-brown, pale yellow, and light to medium brown in color.

Tannins are polymers of phenolic rings combined in complex ways and found in two general forms within trees leaves: condensed and sugared. Condensed tannins are laid side by side and can be precursors of anthocyanins (proanthocyanidins) under strong acidic conditions. Sugared tannins, or hydrolyzable tannins, are complexly interconnected with each other and sugars in small pieces. These two groups of tannins are not related to each other in how each are generated within a leaf.

From a color standpoint, tannins generate dark colors. The sugared tannins are more water soluble than condensed tannins, and can form anthocyanins under weak acidic conditions. Tannins are reactive materials and can bind proteins together, disabling critical cellular, decay and digestive enzymes. Because tannins are dangerous to cell proteins, they are kept in cell vacuoles till cell death.

Betalain Special Red

Betalains (betacyanins or chromo-alkaloids) are water soluble, bright, alkaloid pigments stored in cell vacuoles. They were discovered in 1919. Betalains, like anthocyanins, are not essential to tree cells. Betalains are found in only one order of angiosperms called the *Caryophyllales* (*Chenopodiales*) and in some basidiomycete fungi. Within the *Caryophyllales* order there are several plant families, including the *Caryophyllaceae* and *Molluginaceae* which do not have betalains. If a plant has betalains, they will not have anthocyanins, and if they have anthocyanins they will not have betalain pigments.

Trees with betalains are generally from the Mediterranean basin, Madagascar, and South Asia. Trees with betalain pigments are usually salt and drought tolerant. Common plants with betalains include many carnivorous plants like pitcher plants, cactus, many succulents, seagrapes, pokeweed, jojoba, smartweed, sorrel, dock, buckwheat, rhubarb, salttree, bougainvillea, portulaca, ombu-tree, spinach, sugar beets and beets. The shirt-staining, water soluble pigment of a cut beet root is a betalain, not an anthocyanin. Notably, carnations, pinks, campions and mouse-ears within this order of plants have anthocyanins not betalains.

Betalains are made from the amino acid tyrosine and has four carbon rings, many oxygens, and two nitrogens. Light is not required for inducing or producing this pigment. As an alkaloid, it is kept out of the way in vacuoles of cells tethered to a sugar. Because it contains nitrogen, this pigment is part of a reabsorption process from the senescing leaf. Like anthocyanins, betalains reflect different colors depending upon pH conditions in the cell. Betalains are red to violet under basic pH conditions (called betacyanins), and yellow to orange under acidic pH conditions (called betaxanthins). Betalains have little impact on Fall foliage coloration in trees of Eastern North America, but can be found in understory and forest edge plants.

Pigment Summary

Fall colors herald Winter and approach of a following Spring. No new or unique mechanisms are used in generating fall colors, just pigments and colorants trees use for other functions. The "watercolor," "oil paint," and "earth tone" colors all provide a fantastic show which humans around the temperate areas of the globe have long appreciated. Figure 12.

The chemistry of tree life can be colorful !

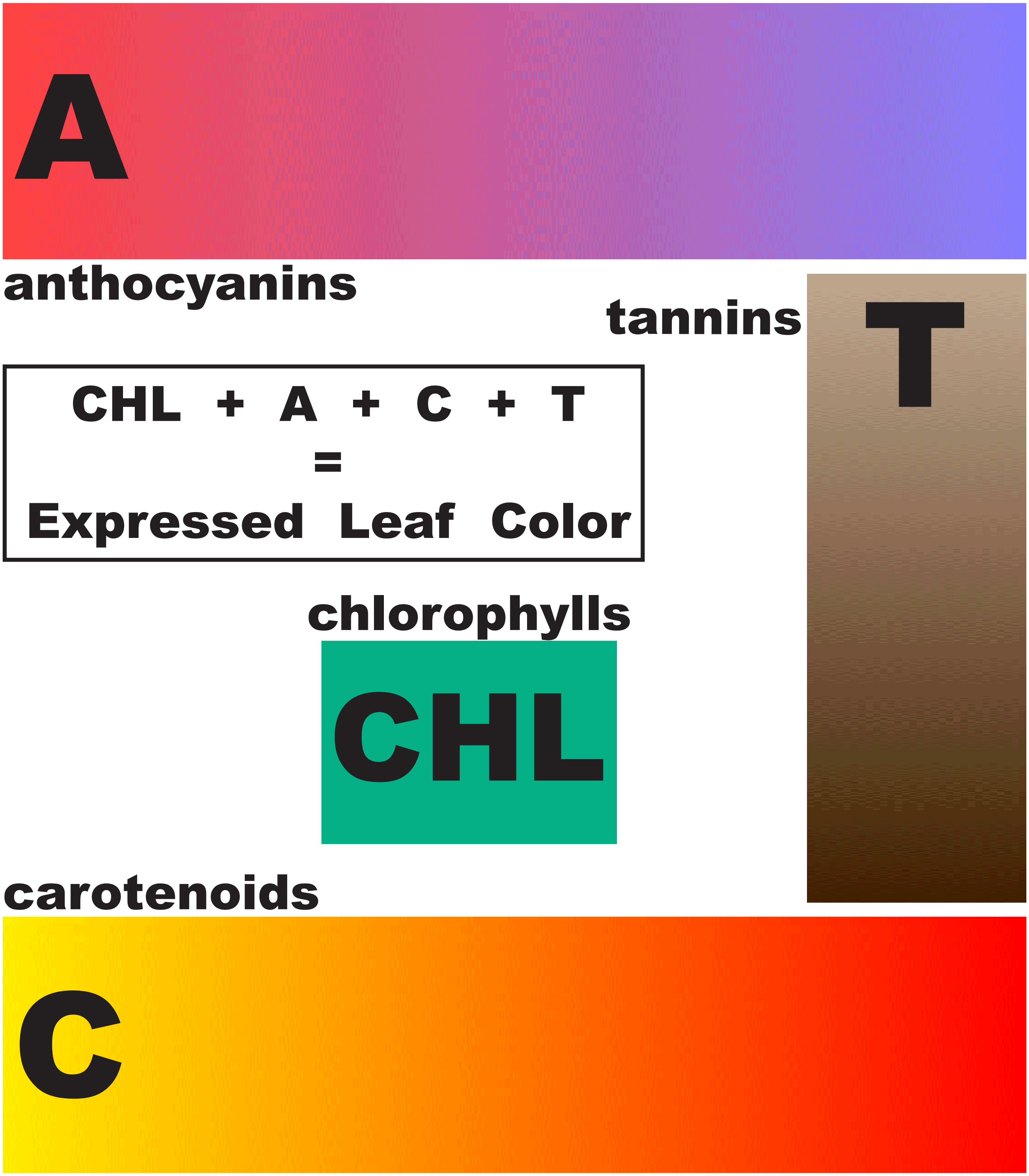


Figure 12: Generalized color range for major pigments comprising the autumn tree color expression palette.

Leaf Abscission

When leaves become inefficient and unable to produce food and growth regulators due to internal sensors and controls, environmental conditions, or some pests, a process of shutting-down and sealing-off begins. Trees shed many parts besides leaves, including fruit, flowers, bud scales, stipules, trichomes, branchlets, twigs, and periderm. For example, in the above ground portion of one medium sized mature tree, more than 30,000 tree peices and parts were shed to the outside environment in one year, not including leaves.

The mechanism of tissue shedding has two components – active and passive. The active part is development of an abscission zone. Tree tissues, like leaves, are actively prepared for removal through biological and mechanical means. The passive part of tissue shedding is development of structurally weak areas, along which, force can be concentrated and tissues torn away by the environment. In other words, some tissues have cells which are forcibly broken apart, while other tissues have built-in weak zones which allow these tissues to be ripped away.

Shedding

Trees are shedding organisms. Trees shed inefficient or dead tissues internally as heartwood. Trees also shed tissues to the outside as root turnover, leaf and twig abscission, periderm shedding, and through general compartmentalization. Shedding allows trees to maintain the most effective and efficient tissues to assure survival. If internal allocation problems or external environmental damage occurs, trees can eliminate unmaintainable living mass through shedding.

Leaf fall at the beginning of a dormant season in deciduous trees is one of the most visible of all shedding processes. By carefully examining fallen leaves and leaf scars from where each fell, one thing becomes apparent -- the wound in most trees is usually smooth with vascular tissue ends clearly visible. The wound looks as though the leaf snapped-off in one catastrophic moment. Actually, leaf abscission is the culmination of many events and actions by a tree and within the environment.

End of Senescence

Abscission is the last step in a planned senescence process within tree leaves. Senescence is a series of events which allow trees to conserve resources, prepare for a resting period, and shed inefficient tissues. Senescence is not a disruptive series of unrelated events cued by worsening climatic factors. Senescence is a highly ordered and carefully controlled set of steps initiated in preparation for a resting stage in above-ground portions of a tree.

Near the end of a senescence process, designed fracture or failure lines finish their development at the base of tissues to be shed, like leaves. These prearranged fracture lines allow leaves to tear away without exposing a tree to additional damage. Leaf abscission is part of a process which allows a tree to seal-off and discard tissues which will soon be killed and consumed by the environment. Trees use a senescence sequence to systematically remove valuable resources from leaves before they die. Once resources are recaptured by a tree, dead and dying leaf tissues can then be shed. Frosts and heavy freezes at night, or sustained below-freezing air temperatures, quickly damage living cells in leaf blades and petioles. Once leaf cells are killed, all resources each cell possessed are unavailable for reabsorption into a tree.

Abscission Zones

An abscission zone occurs at the base of leaf petioles and at the base of leaflets. Figure 13. Abscission zones are designed to allow for leaf shedding. Leaves are shed through a number of biological actions which weaken cell walls and initiate cells tearing away from one another. Abscission zones are composed of three critical portions: A) a cell wall degradation area; B) a shear force generation area; and, C) a tree protection zone. All three abscission zone portions are required for successful leaf shedding and effective tree survival. Most abscission zones are pre-positioned to facilitate shedding. Abscission zones may not be needed or used, but they are set-up to act as a potential barrier and boundary.

Wall Weakening

The abscission process begins with growth regulator signals initiating cellular changes. Abscission zone cells secrete pectinase and cellulase (wall degradation enzymes). These enzymes degrade the strength of the middle lamella and primary wall between cells. Figure 14. The middle lamella, the "glue" which holds cells together, begins to dissolve in the abscision zone.

At the same time, surrounding primary walls begin to swell from changes in chemical components. Calcium bridges across cell wall materials are removed. Cell wall changes are caused by enzymes and other materials deposited in cell walls produced by surrounding living cells. Cells in the abscission zone are dense with cytoplasm and organelles. Each cell is actively respiring and using energy to produce abscission materials. These cells remain alive and active until abscission.

More Wall Changes

As cell wall interconnections are weakened, water pressure within thin walled cells (turgor pressure in parenchyma) cause these cells to expand. As cells expand, they generate shear forces by pushing and pulling on surrounding weakened walls. Mechanically, fracture lines begin to develop between cell walls. In addition to internal forces, gravity and wind tugging on leaves help fracture lines grow.

As cell walls pull apart from one another, these open fissure and fracture spaces are filled by deposition of oxidation blocking materials and protective compounds on the tree side. A strong protective boundary zone is prepared to defend remaining tree tissues from the environment and pests. Tyloses, suberin, lignin and other protective boundary-setting materials are developed or deposited on the tree side of an abscission zone. Figure 15.

Passive & Active

In the abscission zone, xylem elements and epidermis cell walls are either not degraded or are slow to weaken. These cells usually must be torn, stretched, or broken physically after connections between surrounding cells have been fractured. Many types of circumstances like gravity, wind, precipitation and animal actions can break apart any remaining connected tissues and allow leaf fall.

The abscission process does require cell respiration and turgor pressure control. Breakdown of select carbohydrates, loss of small but key carbohydrate and protein wall components, increase of pectinase and cellulase enzymes, and removal of calcium wall connectors lead to wall weakening and requires energy. As cell walls weaken further, parenchyma cells continue to osmotically expand, generating tremendous shear pressure on surrounding cell wall connections. Water (and energy) are needed to generate this shear force. Rainfall or irrigation after an extended droughty period may lead to premature leaf fall.

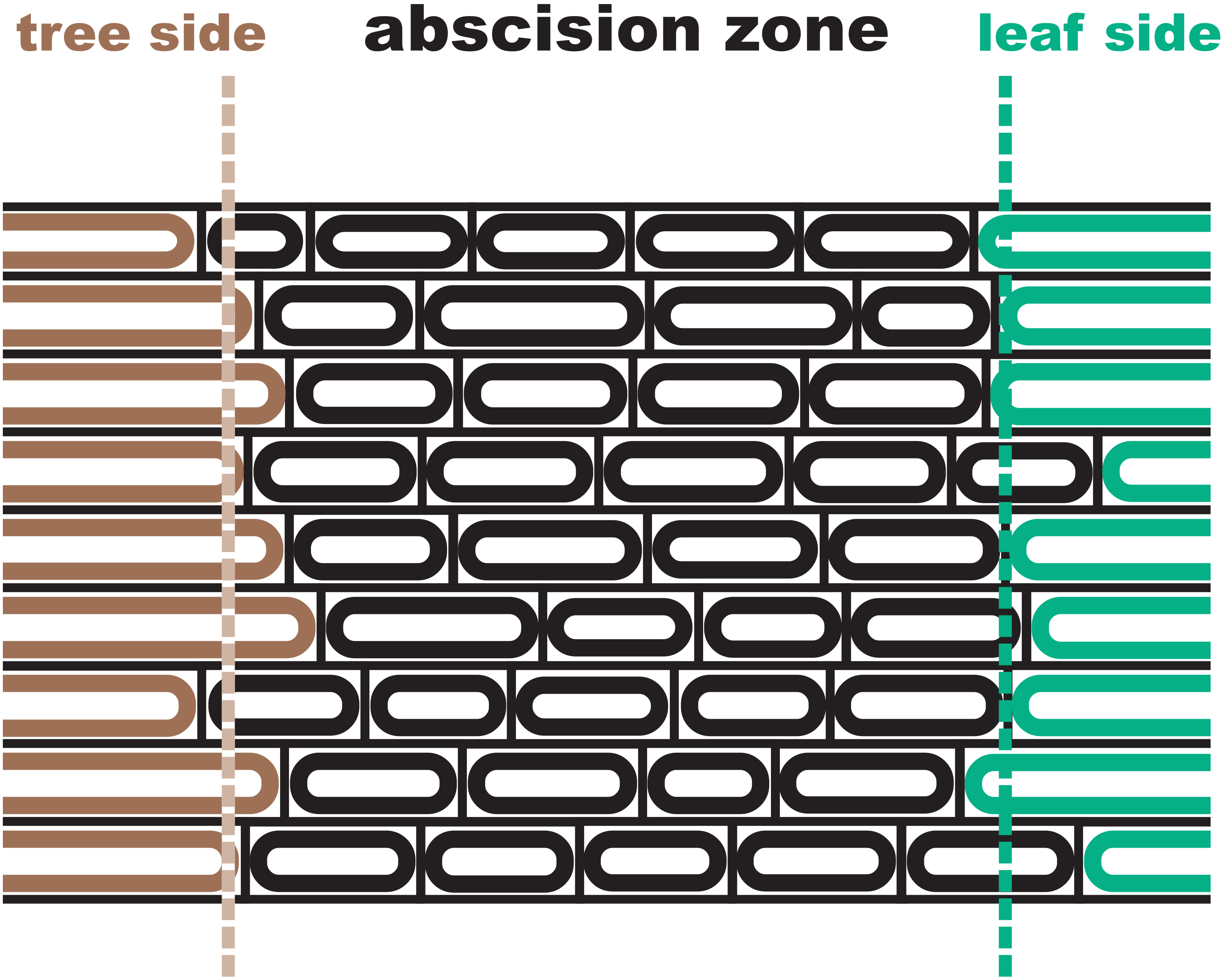


Figure 13: Two-dimensional diagram showing shorter cells in a leaf base abscision zone.

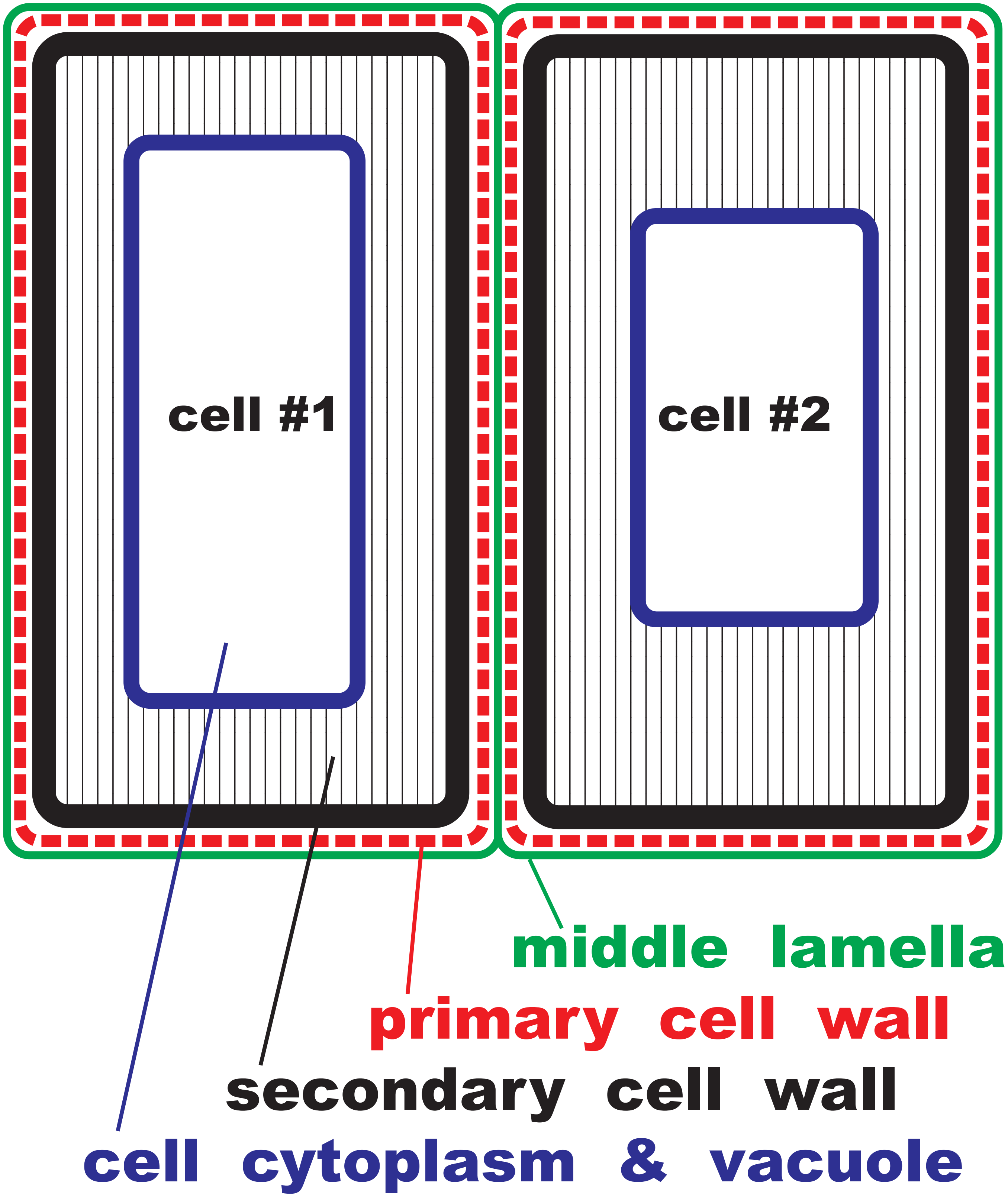


Figure 14: Two-dimensional diagram showing wall components of adjoining cells.

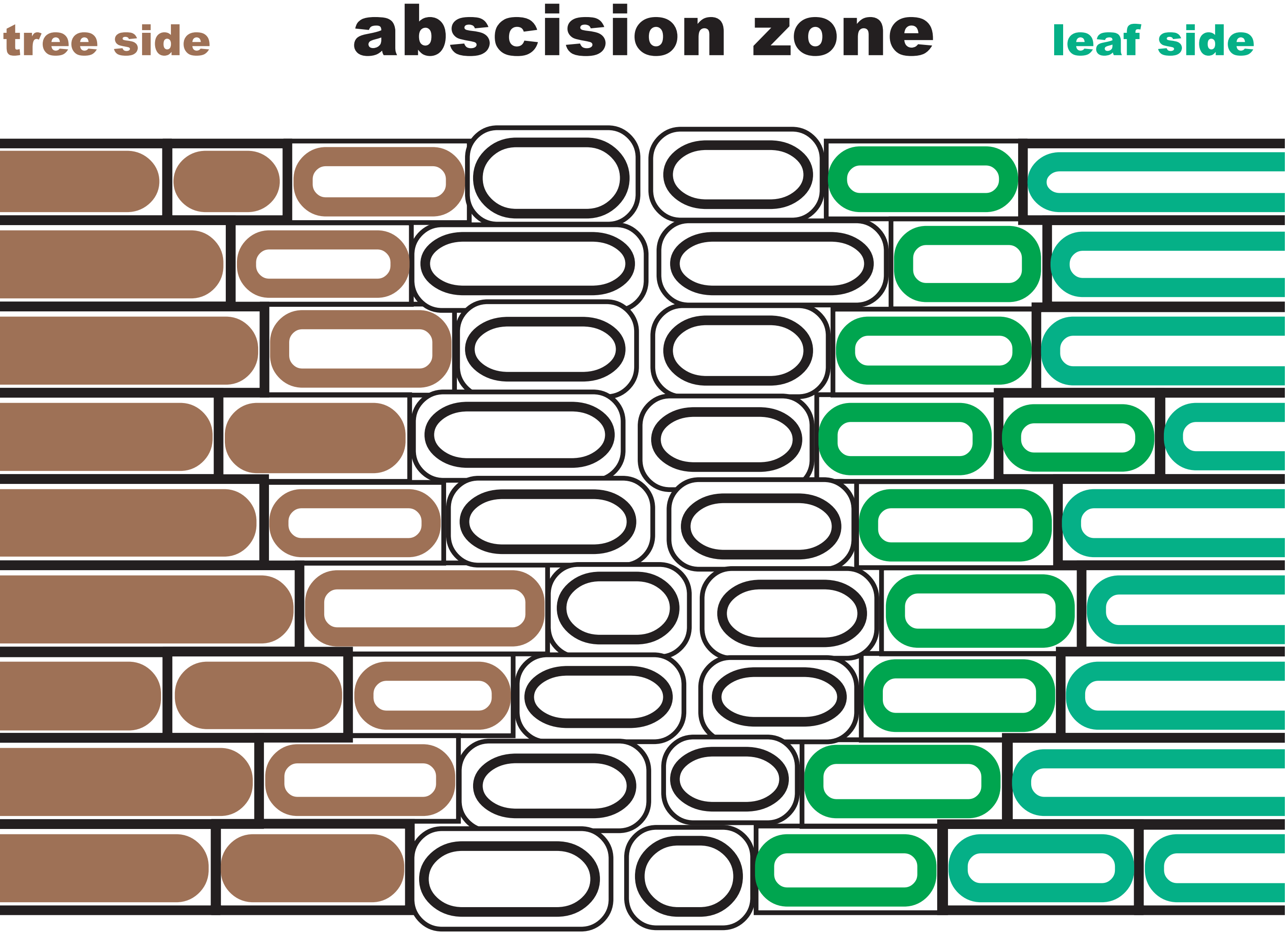


Figure 15: Two-dimensional diagram showing cells in a leaf base abscision zone with a fracture line between cells. Note tree protection zone on the tree side, wall degradation areas, and cell expansion zone all disrupting cell-to-cell connections.

Control Mechanism

Auxin is a primary growth regulator produced in a leaf and slowly transported toward the leaf stem base through living cells. As long as auxin is effectively being transported across the abscission zone, abscission zone cells remain unreactive. As auxin production begins to wane in Fall and auxin transport rates begin to decline due to less auxin availability, to damage of living cells transporting auxin, and/or to accelerating infection or wounding of living tissues by pests, cell wall changes are initiated.

Cell wall changes increasingly inhibit auxin transport, increase auxin concentrations on the leaf side, and accelerate ethylene production. Small amounts of ethylene hasten abscission zone development. ABA (abscisic acid), responsible (in part) for dormancy on-set in a leaf, stimulates ethylene production and inhibits auxin transport further.

In The Zone

Abscission zones in trees can be between 5-40 cells wide. Within this abscission zone only 1-3 cell layers disconnect from each other. Cells in the abscission zone are the same types as found elsewhere in a tree or leaf. But, abscission zone cells tend to be smaller, more densely packed together, with no intercellular spaces, less lignin, and have remained in a cell division phase longer than surrounding cells. Additional cell divisions in this zone prepares cells for later abscission processes. Starch is stored in abscission zone cells to assist in generating turgor pressure and enzymes for wall degradation.

In most absciosion zones, there is a single fault line which develops and is accentuated by additional wall degradations. Cells adjacent to fault line cells will have weakened walls also, allowing any fractures to propagate along several paths for short distances. Rarely, several full fault lines occur leaving the abscission wound ragged-looking. Fault lines follow the path of the middle lamella between cells.

Tree Responses

Deciduous trees do not loose all their leaves at once or just in the Fall. The larger and stronger any connecting xylem elements through the abscission zone, the longer leaves may be held on a tree. Some species do not fully set an abscission layer until early Winter. In other species, shear forces are not concentrated in the abscission zone until the beginning of the Spring growth period. Juvenile trees may not establish effective abscission zones at all and hold dead leaves throughout Winter. Understory trees may hold leaves because of juvenility or because they are protected from climatic events which could knock off leaves. Some trees may abscise all their leaves except on new late-season sprouts.

Tree leaves are designed to be disposable and pass through a senescence process which ends with abscission. Leaf abscission is both an active and passive process designed to seal-off and shed old tissues. Abscission of tissues help trees survive another year. A by-product of this process is a Fall color show.

Color Surfing

The desire of people to see the best tree colors nature has to offer means estimating a time of peak color expression. This estimation process is fraught with problems because predictions are only as good as weather forecasts, tree health, and good chance allows. Human eyesight and color recognition also play a strong role in judging the quality and quantity of landscape color. Additionally, it is not necessarily the single tree and its colored leaves we most appreciate. As annual flowers may be massed together to yield a spectacular color show, trees can be seen as massed across a landscape in Fall. The large swathes of tree colors blanketing autumn landscapes can be fantastic.

A Good Thing

Across a forested or tree-covered landscape, human color perceptions differ as much as tree colors. Some people enjoy and notice the early high contrast yellow stages of coloration. Others most appreciate the diversity of colors during the orange color peak. For other people, deep reds and purples of late Fall represent the best color presentations. Actually, the best colors are ones you can see and enjoy. Even people with limited color perception (color-blind) can enjoy the differences in texture and color contrasts developed in Fall. Any excuse for communing with trees and forests in search of autumn colors is a good thing.

Color Conditions

Any climatic, site, or tree feature which modifies pigments will impact Fall colors. Probably most important to strong color presentations are the weather patterns of the preceding Summer and Fall. In some trees (most notably with ring-porus wood architecture), even events early in the previous Spring can affect this year's Fall colors. The best conditions for Fall tree colors are: cool night temperatures with no freezes or frosts; warm, bright, unclouded sunny days; no drenching rains or wind storms; and, slight drought conditions in the last half of the growing season and on into the Fall. Figure 16.

Healthy Trees!

As in all life-associated functions, a healthy tree is needed for best color expression. A simple summary of good color conditions would be cool (not freezing), sunny, and dry. Fall rain fronts, long overcast periods, and extended periods of high humidity diminish color presentation. So do strong wind storms which blow leaves from trees. Wet and humid growing seasons lead to many leaf infections, premature leaf abscision, and leaching of materials from leaves. Heavy fertilizer applications of nitrogen and phosphorus can mute color expression, maintain chlorophyll longer into the season until a killing frost, or initiate leaf abscision from pests colonizing and damaging late season leaves. Freezing temperature and hard frosts stop color formation dead.

Color Development

Maps can help project color expression during Fall across the Eastern United States based upon historic weather measures. Figure 17 shows the month when the average sunshine hours decrease to 180 for the Eastern United States. This average value of sunshine hours tends to initiate senescence processes in trees. Figure 18 shows the month when the average daily temperature of 50°F is reached in Eastern North America. This average temperature pushes senescence along.

Leaf color formation is a natural process in trees.

Short days & cool nights bring changes to trees.

Green colored light-capture systems decline.

Leaf shutting-down, green color fades, reveal colors.

Senscence reveals old colors & makes new colors.

Best colors come with cool, dry, & bright sun.

Frost, freeze, clouds, storms & rain hurt colors.

Oil-paint colors = carotenoids (reds, oranges, yellows).

Watercolor colors = anthocyanins (reds, purples, blues).

Earth-tone colors = tannins (tans, browns).

Many different color combinations produced.

Leaves sealed-off from tree & knocked off.

Fall colors not last gasp, but first breath of Spring.

Figure 16: Process summary steps in developing leaf color from late Summer to late Fall.

TOTAL MONTHLY SUNSHINE HOURS

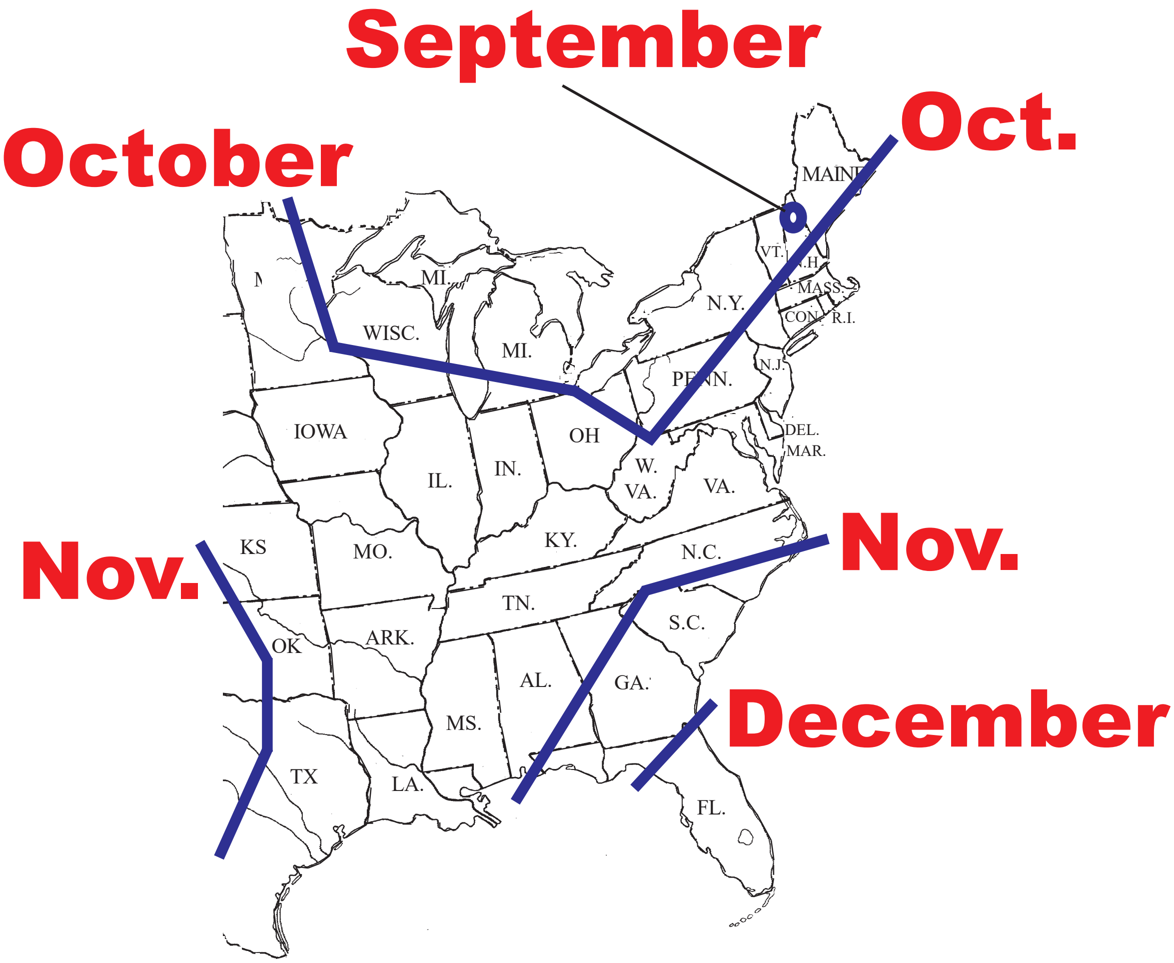


Figure 17: Average monthly progression of 180 monthly sunshine hours across the Eastern United States.

AVERAGE DAILY TEMPERATURES <51°F

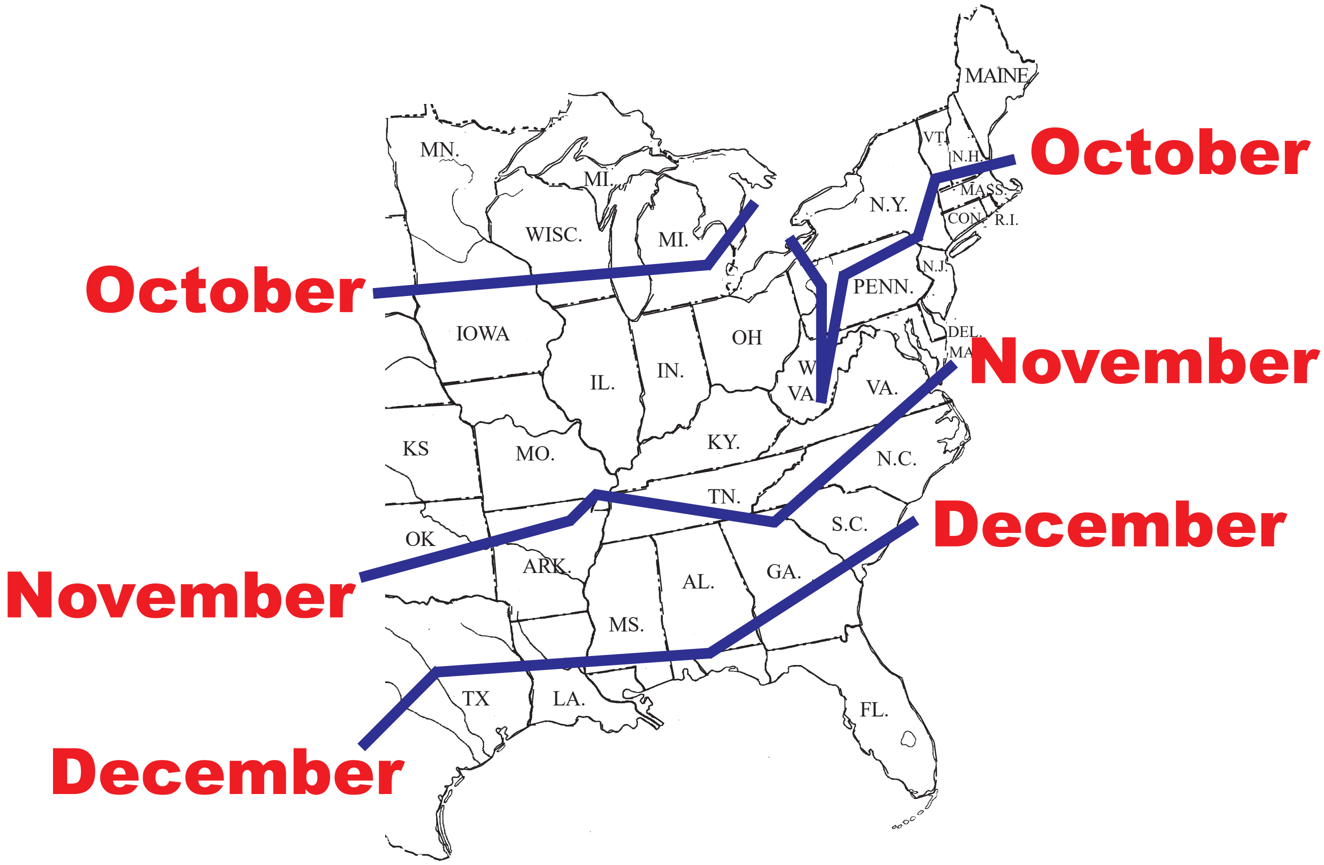


Figure 18: Average daily temperature of <51°F progression across the Eastern United States in autumn.

Figure 19 shows the progression of average minimum daily temperatures of 50°F across the Eastern United States. Figure 20 shows the average first 32°F temperature occurring by the end of each month across the Eastern United States. Figure 21 summarizes climatic and topographic values, showing the Appalachian range combined with the average daily temperatures on an annual basis. It usually takes between and 1 and 1.5 weeks for color expression to move Southward for every 5°F of average temperature change.

Species Color List

Figure 22 provides a list for many common tree species and the normal colors they generate in Fall across the Southeastern United States. In this figure, scientific name, common name, and fall color range are provided for each tree species. Colors are placed into basic wavelength categories. Color descriptions which are hyphenated denote a first dominant color modified by the second listed color. No metallic, artistic, or whimsical color descriptions should be used in tree color descriptions.

Color intensity and purity change across a color expression season. Early in the season, chlorophyll green will taint color expression. Late in the season or after severe frosts, dead tissue's brown colors will modify colors expressed. Average color expression as observed by the author or cited for each tree species follows the Coder Leaf Color Code values. Figure 23 is a summary showing the number of tree species in each color group.

Prediction Features

Key features of predicting Fall tree colors and their peaks are:

1) leaf volume -- how many leaves are entering the color season still attached to their trees as compared to normal;

2) leaf health -- how damaged and disrupted are leaf surfaces from pest and environmental problems;

3) long-range weather forecasts for temperature, sunlight/cloudiness, and precipitation over the color period and preceding few months;

4) actual temperature and precipitation over the last half of the growing season, the whole growing season and the previous year's growing season;

5) key tree species timing and extent of color expression (species with premature and early leaf senescence); and,

6) historical record examination of peak color days from past decades.

Catching Waves

To understand landscape-level Fall coloration in the Southeastern United States, a simple flow and wave model (Coder Leaf Color Propagation Model) can be used. Coloration changes begin at high altitudes and latitudes, and observationally flow down-slope and Southward. Visualizing color waves

DAILY MINIMUM TEMPERATURE

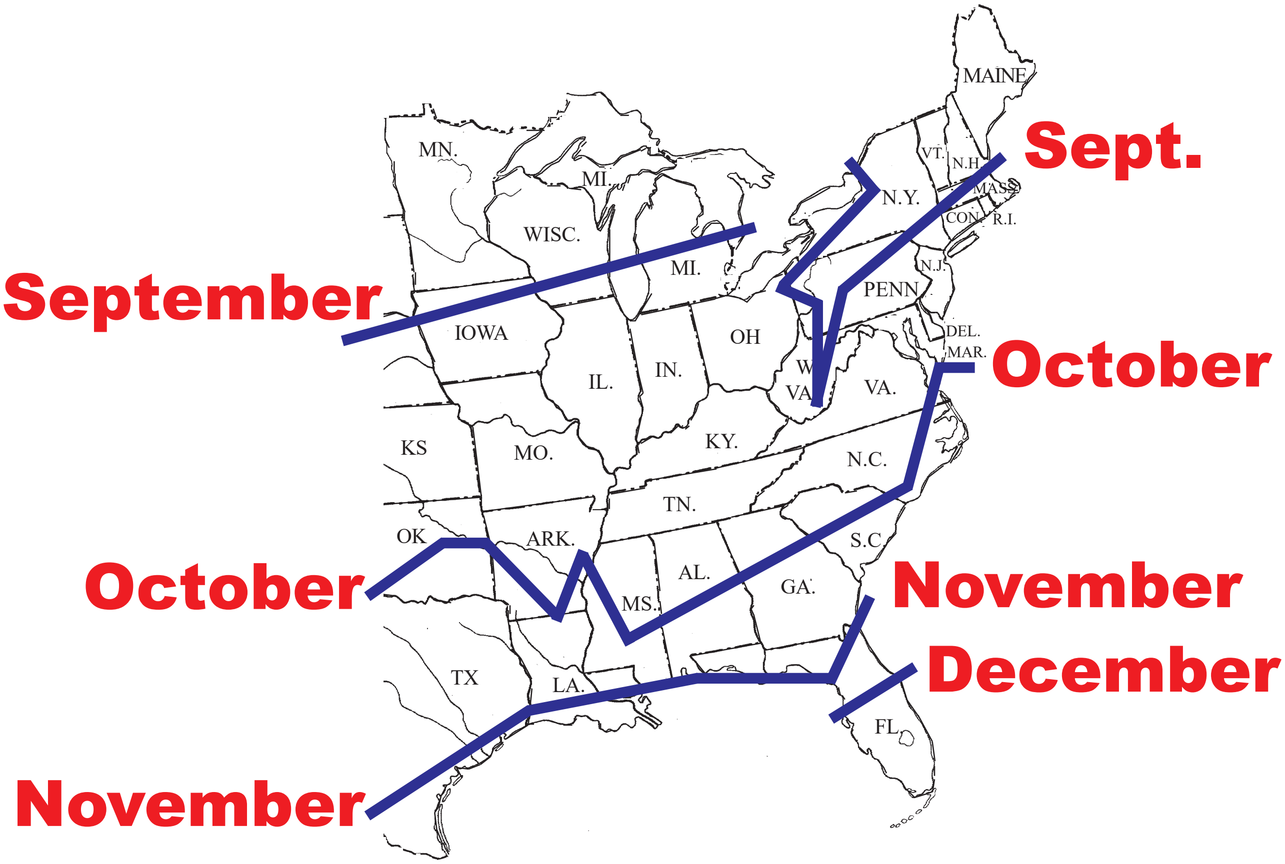


Figure 19: Average daily minimum temperature of 50°F progression across the Eastern United States in autumn.

MONTH OF FIRST 32°F TEMPERATURE

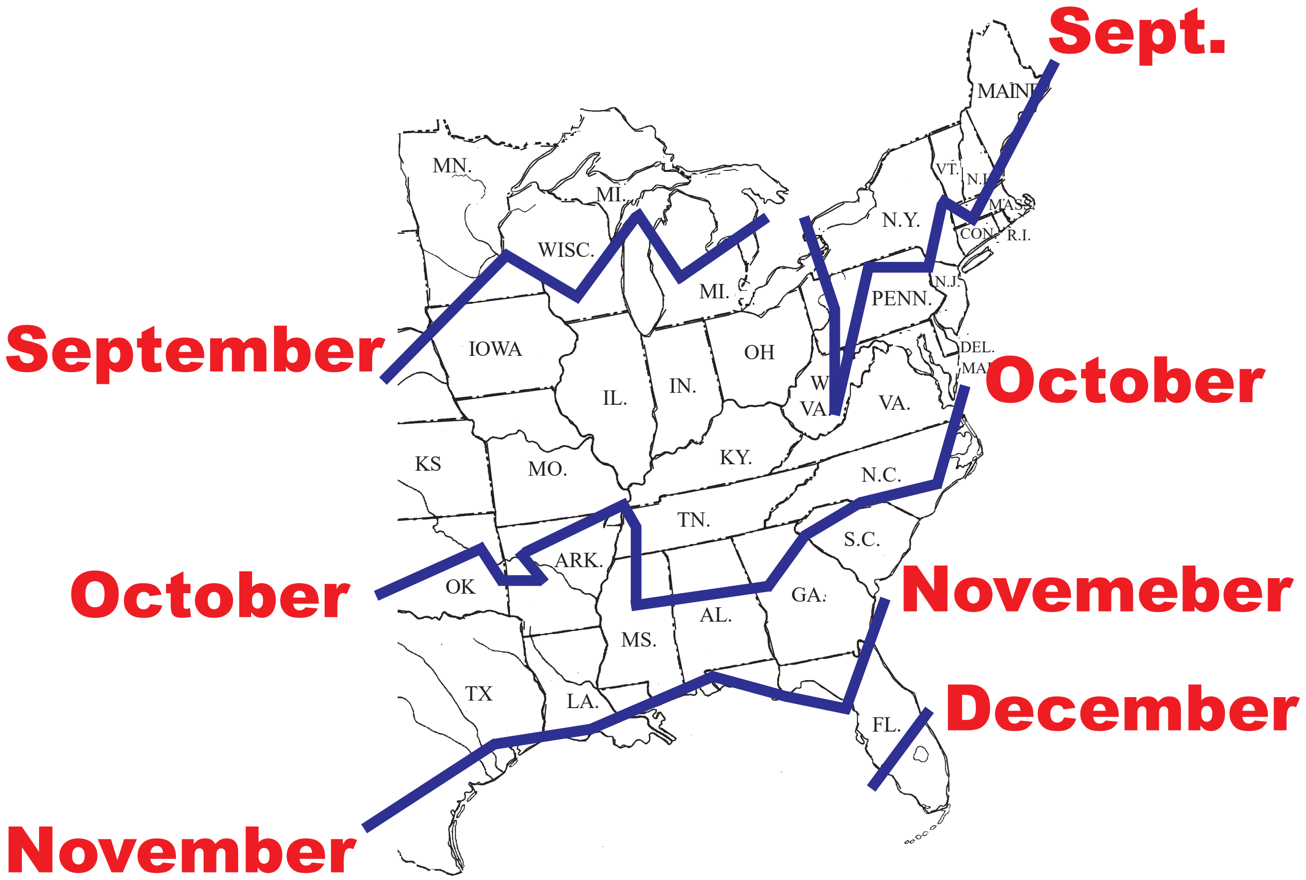


Figure 20: Progression of the average first 32°F temperature occurring across the Eastern United States by the end of each month.

ANNUAL AVERAGE DAILY TEMPERATURE

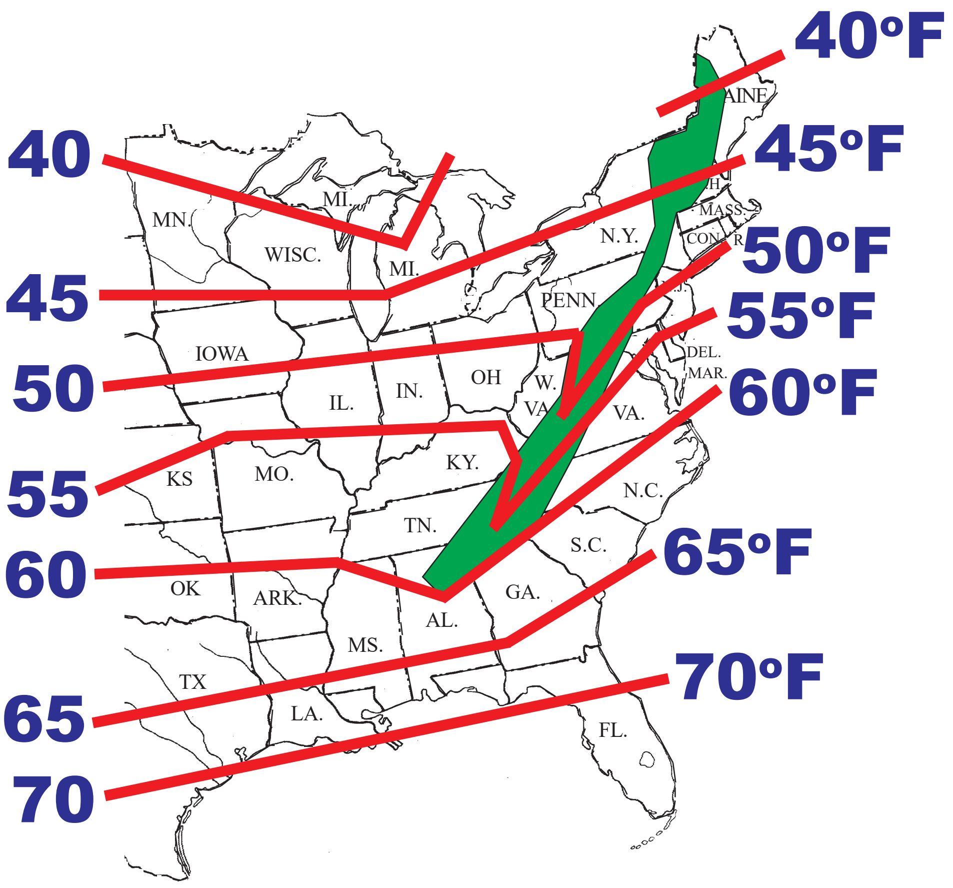


Figure 21: Map providing the area of the Appalachian mountains (shaded area), and the annual average daily temperatures in degrees (^{o}F).

Figure 22: Autumn colors of selected trees in the SE US.

scientific name	**common name**	**Coder Leaf Color Code value expressed**
Acer barbatum	Florida maple	4
Acer buergerianum	trident maple	3 5 7 8
Acer ginnala	amur maple	3 7
Acer leucoderme	chalk maple	3 3B 5 7
Acer negundo	boxelder	3 3B
Acer nigrum	black maple	3 7
Acer palmatum	Japanese maple	7
Acer pensylvanicum	striped maple	3
Acer platanoides	Norway maple	3 5
Acer rubrum	red maple	3 5 7
Acer saccharinum	silver maple	3 3B 5
Acer saccharum	sugar maple	3 5 7
Aesculus flava	yellow buckeye	5
Aesculus glabra	Ohio buckeye	3 5
Aesculus hippocastanum	horsechestnut	3 3B
Aesculus octandra	yellow buckeye	3
Aesculus parviflora	bottlebrush buckeye	3
Aesculus pavia	red buckeye	3
Aesculus sylvatica	painted buckeye	3 5
Ailanthus altissima	tree-of-heaven	3
Alnus glutinosa	European alder	3B
Amelanchier arborea	serviceberry	4 5
Aralia spinosa	devil's walkingstick	3 3B
Asimina triloba	pawpaw	3
Betula alleghaniensis	yellow birch	3
Betula lenta	sweet birch	3 4
Betula nigra	river birch	3
Broussonetia papyrifera	paper mulberry	2
Carpinus caroliniana	blue-beech	3 5 7
Carya cordiformis	bitternut hickory	4
Carya glabra	pignut hickory	3 4
Carya ovata	shagbark hickory	4
Carya tomentosa	mockernut hickory	4
Castanea dentata	chestnut	3 5
Castanea mollissima	Chinese chestnut	3 3B
Catalpa bignonioides	Southern catalpa	2

Figure 22: Autumn colors of selected trees in the SE US. (continued)

scientific name	**common name**	**Coder Leaf Color Code value expressed**
Celtic laevigata	sugarberry	3
Celtis occidentalis	hackberry	3
Cercis canadensis	redbud	2 3
Chionanthus virginicus	fringe tree	3
Cladrastis kentukea	yellowwood	3 4
Clethra acuminata	cinnamon clethra	3
Clethra alnifolia	pepperbush	3B
Cornus alternifolia	alternate-leaf dogwood	8
Cornus amomum	silky dogwood	9B
Cornus florida	dogwood	7 8
Cornus kousa	Kousa dogwood	7 8
Corylus americana	filbert	2 7B
Cotinus obovatus	smoketree	5 7
Crataegus calpodendron	pear hawthorn	5 7
Crataegus crus-galli	cockspur hawthorn	5 6 8
Crataegus mollis	downy hawthorn	4 6
Crataegus phaenopyrum	Washington hawthorn	5 7
Crataegus viridis	green hawthorn	7
Diospyros virginiana	persimmon	3 5 7
Elliottia racemosa	Georgia plume	3B 6
Euonymus americanus	strawberry bush	7
Euonymus atropurpureus	burningbush	3 5 7
Fagus grandifolia	American beech	3 3B
Fagus sylvatica	European beech	3B 7
Franklinia alatamaha	Franklinia	5 7 8
Fraxinus americana	white ask	3 7 7B 8
Fraxinus pennsylvanica	green ash	3 9
Ginkgo biloba	ginkgo	3
Gleditsiav triacanthos	honeylocust	3
Gymnocladus dioicus	Kentucky coffeetree	3
Hamamelis virginiana	witch hazel	3 4
Helesia diptera	two-winged silverbell	3
Helesia parviflora	little silverbell	3
Helesia tetraptera	Carolina silverbell	3

Figure 22: Autumn colors of selected trees in the SE US. (continued)

scientific name	**common name**	**Coder Leaf Color Code value expressed**
Juglans nigra	black walnut	3 3B
Koelreuteria paniculata	goldenraintree	3 4
Lagerstroemia indica	crapemyrtle	4 7
Lindera benzoin	spicebush	3
Liquidambar styraciflua	sweetgum	3 5 7 8 9
Liriodendron tulipifera	yellow-poplar	3 4
Maclura pomifera	Osage orange	3
Magnolia acuminata	cucumber magnolia	4 7B
Magnolia fraseri	Fraser magnolia	3 3B
Metasequoia glyptostroboides	dawn redwood	5B 7B
Morus alba	white mulberry	3
Morus rubra	red mulberry	3
Nyssa sylvatica	blackgum	5 7 9
Ostrya virginiana	ironwood	3 5
Oxydendrum arboreum	sourwood	7
Parthenocissus quinquefolia	Virginia creeper	5 7
Pistacia chinensis	pistache	5 6
Platanus occidentalis	sycamore	3B 4
Populus deltoides	cottonwood	3
Prunus pensylvanica	fire cherry	3 5 7 8
Prunus serotina	black cherry	2 4 5 7
Prunus virginiana	chokecherry	3
Ptelea trifoliata	hoptree	3
Pyrus calleryana	ornamental pears	5 7 9
Quercus acutissima	sawtooth oak	3 3B
Quercus alba	white oak	3 3B 7 7B
Quercus bicolor	swamp white oak	7
Quercus chapmanii	Chapman oak	3 5 7
Quercus coccinea	scarlet oak	7
Quercus ellipsoidalis	northern pin oak	3B 7B
Quercus falcata	Southern red oak	3B 7B

Figure 22: Autumn colors of selected trees in the SE US. (continued)

scientific name	**common name**	**Coder Leaf Color Code value expressed**
Quercus falcata var. pagodifolia	cherrybark oak	2 3B
Quercus imbricaria	shingle oak	3B 7B
Quercus incana	bluejack oak	7B
Quercus laevis	turkey oak	7
Quercus lyrata	overcup oak	3B 7B
Quercus macrocarpa	bur oak	3 3B
Quercus marilandica	blackjack oak	3B 5B 7
Quercus michauxii	swamp chestnut oak	5B 7B
Quercus montana (prinus)	chestnut oak	3B 4 7
Quercus muehlenbergii	chinkapin oak	7B
Quercus nigra	water oak	3B 4B
Quercus nuttallii	Nuttall oak	7B
Quercus oglethorpensis	Oglethorpe oak	7
Quercus palustris	pin oak	7 7B
Quercus phellos	willow oak	3B
Quercus robur	English oak	7 7B
Quercus rubra	red oak	7 7B
Quercus shumardii	Shumard oak	7 7B
Quercus stellata	post oak	3B 7
Quercus velutina	black oak	3B 7 7B
Rhus (Toxicodendron) vernix	poison sumac	3 5 7
Rhus aromatica	fragrant sumac	7B
Rhus copallina	winged sumac	7 8
Rhus glabra	smooth sumac	7
Rhus radicans	poison ivy	3 5 7
Rhus typhina	staghorn sumac	5 7
Robinia pseudoacacia	black locust	3
Salix nigra	black willow	3
Sambucus canadensis	elder	3
Sapium sebiferum	tallowtree	7
Sassafras albidum	sassafras	3 5 7
Sophora japonica	pagodatree	3
Sorbus americana	American mountain-ash	4 8
Styrax americanus	Amrican snowbell	2

Figure 22: Autumn colors of selected trees in the SE US. (continued)

scientific name	**common name**	**Coder Leaf Color Code value expressed**
Taxodium ascendens	pondcypress	7 7B
Taxodium distichum	baldcypress	5B 7B
Tilia americana	basswood	3 5B
Tilia cordaya	littleleaf linden	3
Ulmus alata	winged elm	3 4
Ulmus americana	American elm	4
Ulmus parvifolia	lacebark elm	3 7 8
Ulmus rubra	red elm	3 3B
Vaccinium arboreum	sparkleberry	8
Viburnum dentatum	arrowwood	7
Viburnum lentago	nannyberry	5 7
Viburnum nudum	possumhaw	7
Viburnum prunifolium	blackhaw	6 7
Viburnum rufidulum	rusty blackhaw	3B 7
Vitis rotundifolia	muscadine grape	3
Wisteria frutescens	American wisteria	3
Zelkova serrata	zelkova	3B 5B

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CODE #	COLOR	PERCENT
1	GREEN	0
1B	Green-Brown	0
2	Green-Yellow	6%
3	YELLOW	28%
3B	Yellow-Brown	10%
4	Yellow-Orange	7%
5	ORANGE	12%
5B	Orange-Brown	2%
6	Orange-Red	2%
7	RED	20%
7B	Red-Brown	7%
8	Red-Purple	5%
9	PURPLE	1%
9B	Purple-Brown	0
10	Purple-Blue	0

Figure 23: Distribution of colors among SE tree species.

sweeping over a landscape can help in explaining color changes, and associated environmental changes, occurring in Fall. Tree coloration advances in three primary waves in mixed hardwood forests.

Peaks

The first wave is yellow dominated. The second wave is orange. The third and final wave is red. Each wave, depending upon location is separated from the next wave by anywhere from six to sixteen days. Most humans consider peak color occurring just as the orange wave sweeps bye. After the red wave hits, landscapes slowly fade to brown. Figure 24. Time between color wave peaks has been growing longer over the last decade. The best color presentation point of the year (considered peak of orange wave) has continued to occur progressively later in the year over the last 25 years. Climatic factors impacting tree senescence processes is the dominant cause.

Color Quenching

As color waves move Southward, conditions yielding the best color expression are less and less present, and not as strongly impacting on trees. Color waves eventually pass Southward and are quenched in the evergreen forests of the Southern coastal plains. As Fall progresses, the last pigments fade and leaves fall away to carpet and enrich the forest floor. Even as this year's leaves are raked, tree buds have next year's leaves set to grow. Life processes continue within the rest of a tree to ensure surviving Winter. Fall colors represent not a last gasp, but a first breath of a new Spring. Next year with Spring bud break, chlorophyll veils will again come out with Fall colors hidden beneath their surfaces.

Overall Summary

Best tree color presentations are the additive effects and good fortunes of both healthy trees and perfect climatic conditions. With so many different events leading to great tree color, only a few years have a perfect combination for best autumn color expression.

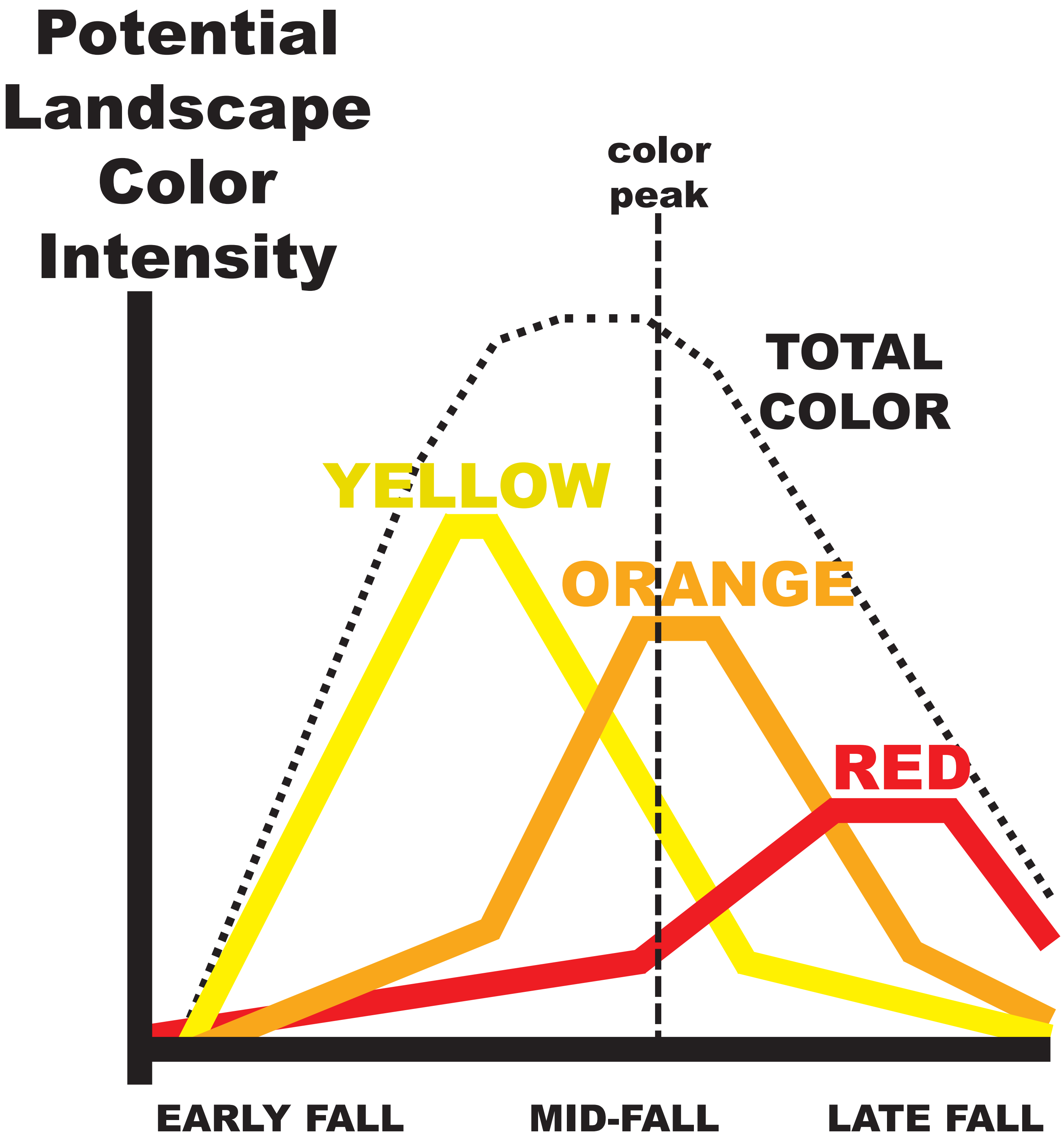

Figure 24: Principle landscape color waves of the Coder Leaf Color Propagation Model. Most people consider peak color at dashed line representing the orange peak.

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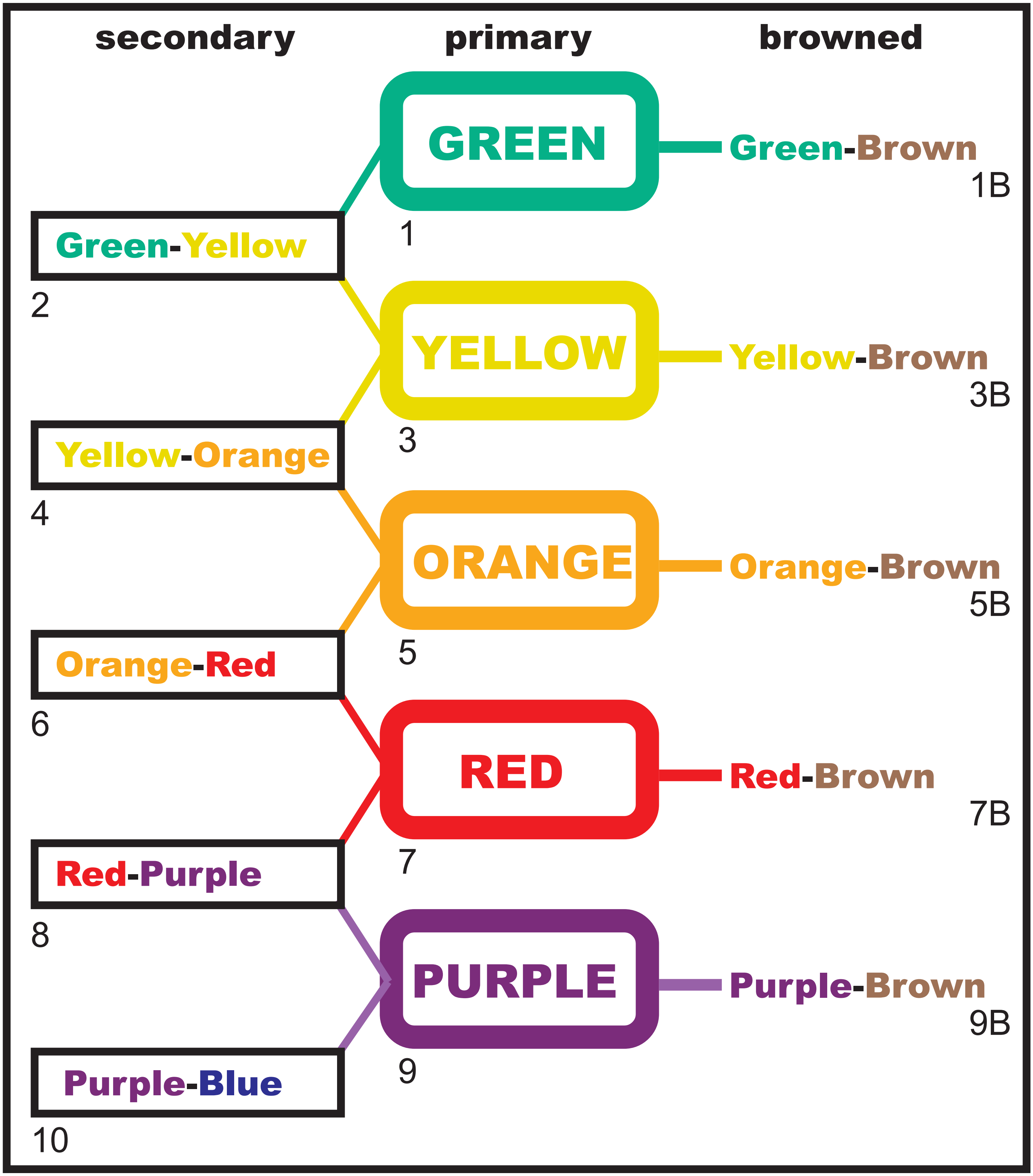


secondary

primary

browned

GREEN
1

Green-Brown
1B

Green-Yellow
2

YELLOW
3

Yellow-Brown
3B

Yellow-Orange
4

ORANGE
5

Orange-Brown
5B

Orange-Red
6

RED
7

Red-Brown
7B

Red-Purple
8

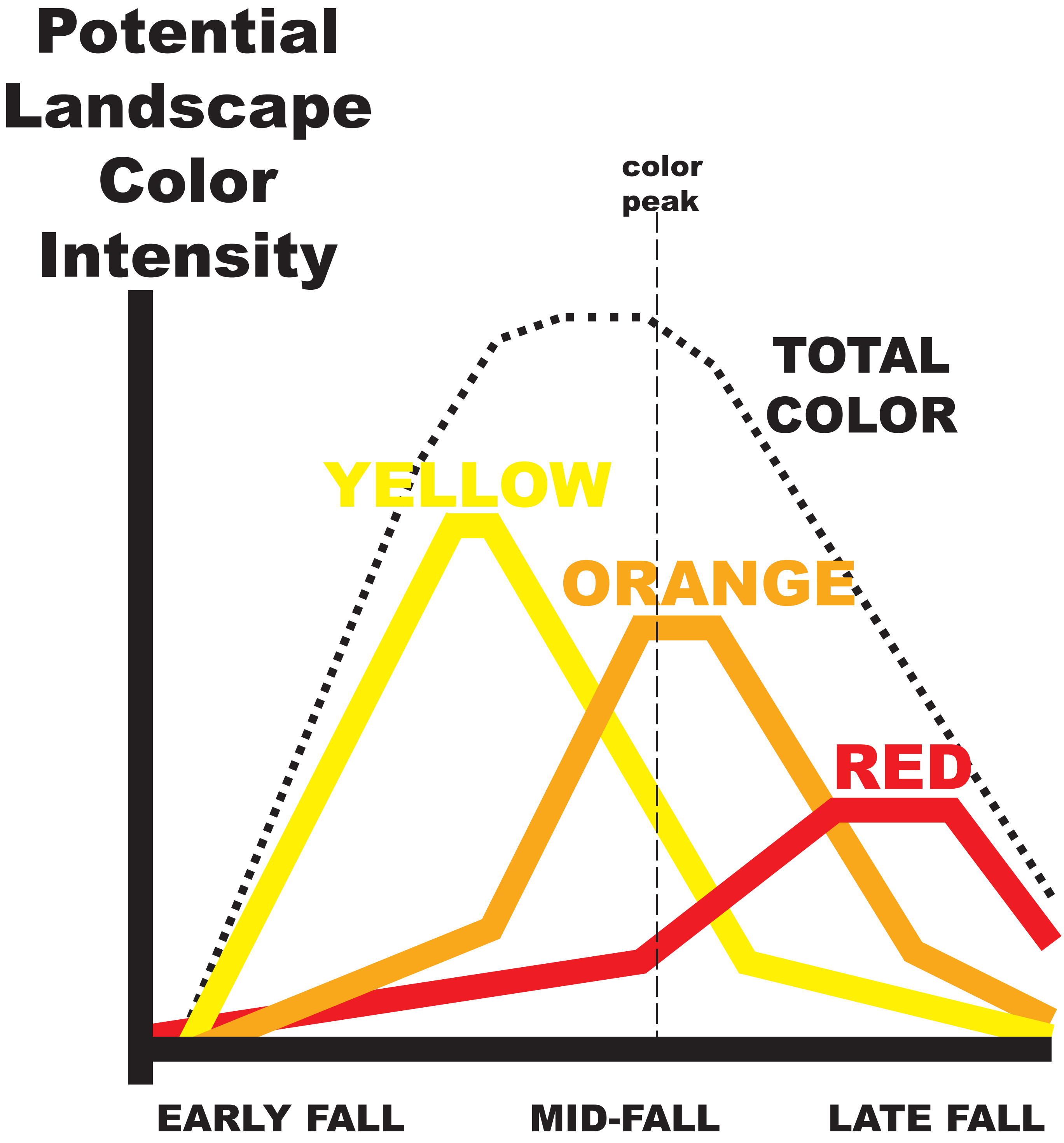
PURPLE
9

Purple-Brown
9B

Purple-Blue
10

Coder Leaf Color Code Values

Each color modified by light (L) / dark (A), & intense (I) / dull (U).



Primary landscape color waves of Coder Leaf Color Propagation Model.

Citation:

Coder, Kim D. 2021. Manual Of Fall Tree Color Development.
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