

Autumn colours

Digging deeper...

Why do some trees shed their leaves for the winter?

The lack of sunlight in the winter months means it is more efficient for deciduous trees to lose their leaves and go into a dormant state than to try to maintain them and keep carrying out photosynthesis. This allows the trees to conserve much energy and water that would otherwise be lost. When the days get longer again the trees burst back into life.

Digging deeper...

Why do leaves change colour?

Leaves are energy-harvesting factories that convert energy from the sun into usable energy through photosynthesis. This requires chlorophyll, the molecule that makes the leaves green. Deciduous trees stop making chlorophyll just before they shed their leaves for the winter, causing the green colour to fade from the leaves.

Arrowtown, on the banks of the Arrow river, was once one of the world's richest sources of gold. Only a few relics of the goldmining days remain but the colour of gold returns en masse every autumn as the majestic trees lining Arrowtown's main avenue start preparing for winter.

Autumn is very much the season of colour. The sycamores, oaks, poplars and willows that line the waterways and roadsides paint it in wonderful golds and yellows, and the extensive areas of fruit trees and grapes add fiery reds and oranges to the mix.

But when did all these trees arrive here? They are, after all, not native to our shores. European emigrants were in the habit of taking a few things from home abroad with them and those that settled here were no exception. Some plants and animals were brought for specific purposes, such as food, while others were brought more to make the colony 'feel like home'. Among these were deciduous trees such as willows, European beeches and poplars.

The best autumn colours occur in April in some of the old goldmining towns such as Arrowtown, Macetown and Skippers. Wanaka, a great scenery stop any time of the year, takes on a golden hue as the poplars lining the lake start to shed their leaves. The expanding wine industry is further adding to Central Otago's autumn gold.



Full autumn glory



Autumn grapevine in an orchard

