

Making Ripples

Autumn Equinox Arrives

by Amanda Bancroft

Our descent into winter's darkness is contrarily marked by exuberant celebrations throughout nature. Trees explode into brilliant autumn colors and shower the sidewalks with a rainbow layer of fragrant leaves. Ripening orange pumpkins tempt us on their vines. White-tailed deer are entering their rut, running around the countryside to find or flee from their mates. Butterflies are still frolicking in the meadows, and even in death, decorate the ground with patterned wings. Autumn is a time to delight in life and death alike, with harvests made possible by both.

It's a season of struggle for some, like the hummingbirds. Don't remove nectar feeders yet! There may not be much activity at your feeder, but starving migrants are in search of a meal, and yours could tip the scales in favor of survival. These cute aerial squeakers thank you in advance.

Wild Canada geese honk in rhythm as they fly past the countryside looking for rest stops on their way south. Geese migrants are exhausted and will be on their way once ready. Allow them some space and they provide the entertainment – even a special honking song for takeoff!

Author and Unitarian Universalist minister Robert Fulghum encourages leaf-raking procrastination in "All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten." Here's what he says: "Mine is the only yard in the neighborhood with leaves...I like the way it looks. My wife does not. The gardening magazine does not like it, either. Leaves should be raked. There are rules....There is a reason for leaves. There is no reason for mowed grass. So say I." Aesthetics and healthy soil can meet in the middle with mulch. Mulching leaves in a thin layer throughout the lawn allows them to sink into the ground faster, and nourish it for next year.

Want to save some money on produce? Look into what kinds of wild edibles are near you this season. For example, wild persimmon is plumping on the branches right now, and it will be ready to eat once it turns purplish orange and either falls right off the branch into your sheet or comes off easily in the hand. The taste is like a sweet potato, but only when fully ripe. Maybe you'd like to plant trees like persimmon, paw-paw, mulberry or berry bushes for your family and wildlife alike as a longer-term investment.

Seed saving is taking on new meaning in this age of genetically modified (but still dispersed by nature) plants with patents owned by companies. If you garden or have a native plant patch for wildlife, save the seeds and you'll save money by having to purchase fewer plants the following year. We're also approaching the time to plant milkweed, so if that's what you've been waiting for, get ready with those seeds!

Amanda Bancroft is a writer, artist, and naturalist building an off-grid cottage for land conservation on Kessler Mountain. She and her husband Ryan blog about their adventures and offer a solar-hosted online educational center on how to make a difference with everyday choices at: www.RipplesBlog.org.