Top tips for Autumn Shooting

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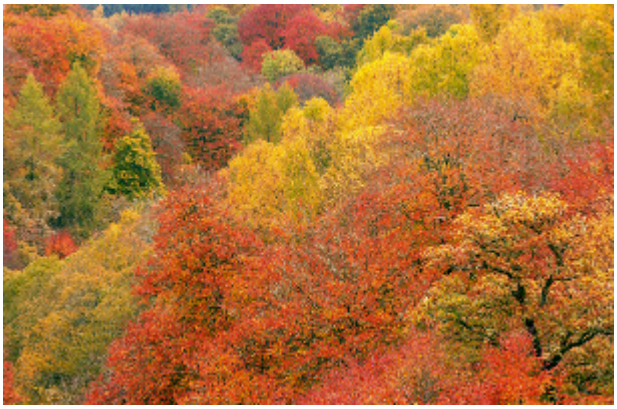
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Mid September heralds the start of autumn. With the harvest being gathered in, hedgerows heavy with berries and colour everywhere, it's certainly the season of plenty – including for photographers.

Time of day

Mornings are often the best time for autumn shots, before the rising sun has had time to evaporate sparkling dewdrops or to disperse the characteristic mists wreathing the landscape. Of course, with the days are getting shorter you don't need to get out of bed in the middle of the night to set up before dawn, which is an added bonus of autumn shooting. The golden light at sunset is also terrific for autumnal colours.

Camera settings



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Play around with your camera settings – Shade or Cloud or a manually set white balance might capture warmer, more pleasing results than your default settings, while the Vivid picture-control setting will give you more contrast and saturation to really make those colours sing. Underexposing very slightly often yields a similar effect.

Accessories

A polarising filter will saturate foliage colours and emphasise the blue of the sky, while neutral density (ND) filter enables you to create a fluid, ethereal effect by slowing your shutter speed right down to capture leaves dropping or rushing streams or waterfalls strewn with leaves against a backdrop of autumn colour. With an ND filter, use a tripod and a shutter release to steady the camera – doing this is also vital for the longer exposures you'll need in low morning or evening light.

Composition



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Changing your viewpoint can yield eye-catching images. When you find a colourful patch of leaves, for example, stop and think about your composition before you shoot. Walk round the scene, looking for a small grouping of leaves that really catches your eye. Check how the light changes as you change position; it can result in highlighting a particular leaf, silhouetting it or bringing it out in relief against the background. Framing against a clear blue or dark, stormy sky can also be very effective, but avoid shooting into the sun as this can cause flare and wash out those bright colours.

Close-ups can be very effective with subjects like leaves and fungi, and one option is to home right in to just one part of your subject to really highlight its details. On your COOLPIX, try setting the Macro mode for a really tight shot. Depending on your particular camera, you might be able to get just a couple of centimetres away from your subject for a truly unique 'worm's eye' view – this can work particularly well with mushrooms.

Classic images

There are some classic autumn shots that are always worth trying, and top of the list has to be autumn leaves. Fill the frame with leaves still on the tree, using the long end of a telephoto zoom such as the 70-200mm or 70-300mm. With the sun behind the leaves you can capture an evocative glow or shafts of sunlight raking through, but take care never to look directly at the sun through your lens, and again beware of flare and shadows creeping in. Colourful carpets of fallen leaves can also provide dramatic contrast to bare branches but you need to act fast before the leaves start to fade and mulch down.

Another favourite is morning dew bejewelling foliage or spiders' webs. For the best results move in close, with the sun backlighting the subject, and use a wide aperture (e.g. f/2.8) to throw the background beyond focus – if your camera has a close-up or macro mode then this can also sort out these settings for you. Cold autumn mornings following a cloudless night can result in a dusting of frost over foliage, which can also create great close-up opportunities. For the best results, again use your fastest lens on its widest aperture.
Autumn light is perfect for landscapes, as the sun doesn't get too high in the sky so you get more dramatic side-lighting and shadows, while on overcast days the soft, even light contrasts beautifully with the saturated colours of autumn. Take care to avoid huge expanses of uninteresting bland skies – cloud cover illuminated by shafts of sunlight looks better, and if

that's not available, frame up with mostly landscape to minimise a dull sky in the frame. Matrix metering is ideal, but do check the histogram to ensure no highlights are being clipped, and be prepared to dial in some exposure compensation to increase or decrease saturation. With mist, its reflective qualities can fool the meter into underexposing, so again set one or two stops of over-exposure to deal with this, and check your histogram is more concentrated on the right-hand side, so you're exposing for highlights and mid-tones.



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Quick tips:

• Leafy gardens, parks and lanes are great locations – there's no need to drive for miles to an arboretum or country park if you've got beautiful autumnal trees and shrubs in your garden or local park.

• Focus on whole groups of trees with lots of contrasting colours, especially in mixed forests where you've got deep green conifers as well as deciduous trees in their full autumnal glory.

• Try including other subjects in your autumn photographs for added interest, such as children kicking up leaf drifts – brightly coloured hats and scarves will stand out beautifully against the

russets and golds of the leaves.

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