when days are sunny and nights are cold. It’s during this period that green chlorophyll pigments are active in cells that make food for the tree to grow. It’s during this time that leaves also contain lesser amounts of yellow, orange and red pigments that are masked by the chlorophyll. The occurrence of fall colors is actually the disappearance of green chlorophyll!

COLOR INTENSITY
Intensity of leaf color is determined by the air’s temperature and moisture. Warm, dry days and cool nights (under 45˚F or 7˚C) mean brilliant colors; rainy days and warm nights result in less intense coloration.

COLOR PARADE
If you’ve ever wondered why some leaves turn deep crimson red, while others become so gold they seem to be lit from within like a lamp, here’s your answer: They have pigments called xanthophylls (yellows), carotenoids (yellows, oranges and reds), and anthocyanin (red). Anthocyanin is the result of trapped plant sugar produced by the leaf when days are sunny and nights are cold.

CALIFORNIA BRILLIANCE
In addition to the Eastern Sierra, fall colors dazzle throughout the Golden State. The go-to source is CaliforniaFallColor.com.

Quick Facts about Fall
WHY OUR FALL COLOR SEASON GOES ON AND ON AND ON
The Eastern Sierra’s varied elevations—from approximately 5,000 to 10,000 feet (1524 to 3,048 m)—mean the trees peak in color at different times. Bishop, Inyo County and southern Mono County usually turn color first, with Mammoth Lakes, June Lake, Bridgeport and northern Mono County peaking by mid-October.

TREE SPECIES
Trees that change color in the Eastern Sierra include aspen, cottonwood and willow.

LIKE CLOCKWORK
Ever wonder how Eastern Sierra leaves know to go from bright green to gold, orange, and russet as soon as the calendar hits mid-September? Their cue is actually from the change in air temperature and decreased daylight.

TRUE COLORS
The reason we see fall colors is part of an annual cycle that begins in spring and summer, when green chlorophyll pigments are active in cells that make food for the tree to grow. It’s during this time that leaves also contain lesser amounts of yellow, orange and red pigments that are masked by the chlorophyll. The occurrence of fall colors is actually the disappearance of green chlorophyll!

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Fall Colors Astound
“The secret California drum... Just follow the scenic US Route 395 as it connects wonders.”
—Lonely Planet’s Top 10 US travel destinations for 2013

“One of the USA’S 5 Best Road Trips.”
— USA Weekend/USA Today Magazine, 2013

“It’d be worth a trip to this corner of the Eastern Sierra for the flaming trees alone. But June Lake also has lakes, waterfalls, jagged peaks, and a little something for everyone.”
— Sunset Magazine’s Top 5 Fall Hikes, 2012

“Blinding displays of yellow and orange.”
— TravelandLeisure.com’s America’s Best Fall Color Drives, 2011

“One of the Sierra’s sublime experiences.”
— GONP.com’s Top Ten Fall Forests, 2010

Welcome to Fall: The Best in America’s West
Our natural landscape in the Eastern Sierra, where rugged granite canyons are carved by rushing streams and framed by an azure sky, offers a spellbinding contrast of colors during autumn—golden, crimson and orange aspen and cottonwoods as far as the eye can see. The best time to see this spectacular array is generally mid-September to mid-October. When you know where to go to see the best fall colors and what activities are in store during this guide, you’re sure to agree with GONP.com’s rating of the High Sierra as No. 2 for Fall Colors in the U.S.A. Continue reading for more about how our warm days and cool evenings are not only ideal for brilliant color—they’re also wonderful for hiking, horseback riding, fishing, mountain biking and unwinding.