

Thoughts about autumn



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By Jim Poling Sr.

Trees, I believe, are smarter than humans. They are more grounded, obviously, but they also have an advanced sense of life, a more mature understanding of what it is all about.

Humans see life as individual time frames with beginnings and ends. Trees see life as infinite ? forever possible through change and renewal.

As autumn tiptoes across our landscapes, and trees shed their summer clothing, we humans feel a sense of sadness. The sun weakens, shadows lengthen, vegetation begins to die. We have a feeling of good things having ended.

Summer, with its sun, fun and freedoms, has gone and left us sadly anticipating the bleakness of winter, which can be restrictive, confining and at times downright cruel. It is a time of change and change is something that most of us dislike and struggle against. Trees, however, see autumn more positively. Autumn is an interregnum, a pause allowing time to prepare for changes needed for the continuation of life. Trees have an important role in the preparations.

Trees are diligent gardeners tending their close-at-hand plots with varying methods of cultivating and seeding. Muscular oaks hurl down acorns containing precious embryos for new life, while the gloriously-crowned maples helicopter their seed pods to the surrounding soil.

Seeds delivered, trees then float millions of dying leaves to the ground where they decay and create rich nutrients that soil needs for growth.

There is no immediate or apparent result from the trees' autumn work. Many months must pass before the first indications of new life will appear.

But unlike we antsy humans, trees are patient and long suffering. They stand naked in the freezing winter winds, firm in their faith that the natural forces guiding all earth events will bring back longer hours of sun and warmth.

It's not that humans don't enjoy and appreciate autumn. The cool air it brings to replace oppressive heat and humidity is much welcome. So are the autumn days and evenings without stinging bugs and flies. Outside activities are fewer perhaps, but fewer active people around also means more serenity.

However, our appreciation of autumn is not deep enough. It is too self-centred. It lacks an understanding of the season's important connection to other seasons and the continuation of life through millennia, not just years.

Trees demonstrate that understanding each September. We would do well to try to build a better understanding of autumn every time the trees begin to drop their seeds and shed their brilliant leaves.

It is not outrageous to say that trees can provide us with some wisdom and better understanding.

However, each year there are fewer trees to look to for their wisdom. The most recent assessments show that the world's forest area decreased from 31.6 per cent of global land area to 30.6 per cent during the 25-year period 1990 to 2015. It is estimated that trees once covered 50 per cent of earth's land mass.

The pace of loss has been slowing in recent years thanks to increased awareness of trees and their importance to all life. That's really great news.

The not-so-good news is that much forest reduction is the result of clearing land to house and feed a growing human population. The current world population is roughly 7.6 billion and is expected to swell to 10 billion people in the next 30 years.

Studies estimate that population growth by 2050 will force the global demand for food to grow by 50 per cent. More mouths to feed means more land for planting, which means more trees have to be cut.

There are other concerns, notably fires, especially in the Amazon which is home to the world's largest and most important tropical forest. Then there is climate change and how it might affect the land. And, of course anti-conservation politicians who seem determined to wipe out the conservation gains of recent decades, all in the name of progress.

Just looking at trees, especially in autumn, offers some understanding, and hope for the future. Trees have been here helping to perpetuate life for 360 million years without negatively altering the planet.

Humans, in our modern form, have been here a mere 200,000 years, generally wreaking havoc. The trees must know something that we don't know.