

The Chimneys at
Linville Gorge
Wilderness

Our State CHECKLIST

THE LEAF-PEEPER'S GUIDE TO THE NORTH CAROLINA MOUNTAINS

22 of our favorite mountain spots to see stunning fall color.

NORTH

GRANDFATHER MOUNTAIN/ LINN COVE VIADUCT

(milepost 304.4)

The Linn Cove Viaduct winds gracefully along the side of Grandfather Mountain and offers gorgeous views to drivers along the way.

ROUGH RIDGE OVERLOOK

(milepost 302.8)

Climb to the viewing platform for a stunning view of the surrounding mountains — and get a bird's-eye-view of Linn Cove Viaduct.

BANNER ELK

High in a northwestern corner of the state, a little town on the Elk River enjoys mild summers, snowy winters, and — perhaps most spectacularly — bright, beautiful autumns.

CHIMNEY ROCK

It's 499 steps to the top of Chimney Rock, but you can catch your breath as you enjoy a fantastic view of Lake Lure below.

BEACON HEIGHTS

(milepost 305.2 + 1-mile roundtrip hike)

A short hike from the parking lot rewards you with an area of exposed rock where you can relax and take in views of Grandfather Mountain, Hawksbill Mountain, and Table Rock.

BLOWING ROCK

This beautiful mountain village is home to downtown restaurants, boutiques, and outdoor activities. At Tweetsie Railroad, take a ride on a real steam locomotive.

CHESTOA VIEW OVERLOOK

(milepost 320.8)

This view requires a very short hike, and at the end you will be rewarded with a spectacular view of Linville Gorge, Table Rock, and Grandfather Mountain.

CENTRAL

Craggy Gardens Visitor Center

(milepost 364.4)

While the wildflowers that give this spot its name will not be blooming as much in the fall, there will still be plenty of color provided on the surrounding mountains.

MT. MITCHELL STATE PARK

(milepost 355.4 + drive into park)

The highest peak this side of the Mississippi is well worth a visit, but the observation deck also makes for some excellent leaf-peeping in the fall. You can drive almost to the peak and then take a short walk to the top.

BILTMORE ESTATE

The Biltmore Estate is beautiful at any time of year, but autumn is an especially good time to visit the house and gardens, since temperatures are comfortable and colors are vibrant.

SOUTH

CHEROHALA SKYWAY NATIONAL SCENIC BYWAY

It may not be as well-known as the Blue Ridge Parkway, but this remote scenic byway offers plenty of dramatic overlooks as it winds through Cherokee and Nantahala national forests.

WATERROCK KNOB

(milepost 451.2)

Waterrock Knob is best visited at either sunrise or sunset. Be sure to bring warm layers as this picnic area sits more than a mile high in elevation.

CULLOWHEE

Check out the fascinating Judaculla Rock (from the Cherokee name *Tsul'kalu*), which is covered in petroglyphs and holds spiritual significance for the Cherokee people.

SYLVA

Visit local shops and restaurants and take advantage of the excellent fly-fishing on the Tuckasegee River in this small mountain town.

RHODES BIG VIEW OVERLOOK

This spot has something special in addition to fall foliage: the mystical phenomenon known as "the shadow of the bear." For a few weeks in mid-October and early November, come to Rhodes Big View Overlook at 5:30 p.m. to watch the shape of a giant bear emerge from behind Whiteside Mountain.

HIGHLANDS BOTANICAL GARDEN

This free botanical garden features plants that are native to the mountain ecosystem, and is a beautiful place to check out the changing colors in the trees and other plants while enjoying a picnic.

OSAGE AND BLUE VALLEY OVERLOOKS

These overlooks on NC Highway 106 near the town of Highlands offer visitors dramatic views of Blue Valley as well as nearby Osage and Scaly mountains from the heart of the Nantahala National Forest.

CULLASAJA AND DRY FALLS

Take U.S. Highway 64 through the Cullasaja River Gorge and you'll pass several dramatic waterfalls. At Cullasaja Falls, autumn leaves frame a 250-foot drop. A short distance upstream is Dry Falls.

RICHLAND BALSAM OVERLOOK

(milepost 431.4)

At 6,053 feet, this overlook is the highest point on the Blue Ridge Parkway — and it's a great place to see some of North Carolina's Fraser fir Christmas trees. But not all of the trees here are evergreen; you'll have plenty of opportunity to see some color.

GRAVEYARD FIELDS

(milepost 418.8)

Leaves here turn early, but this is a spot you won't want to miss. Much of the foliage here is found on shrubs rather than tall trees.

BRYSON CITY

This small town on the border of Great Smoky Mountains National Park is a beautiful place to appreciate the colors of autumn while exploring downtown or taking a ride on the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad.

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

One of the entrances to Great Smoky Mountains National Park is located two miles north of the town of Cherokee, which sits in the Oconaluftee River Valley.

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