

Suggestions for Illinois drives to see fall colors

Get out your hiking boots, leaf peeping season has arrived in the Midwest and there are many places to see fall colors. Pere Marquette State park just north of Grafton, Illinois has never failed to amaze us with the beauty of the trees and the Mississippi River as a back drop. The drive from Alton, Illinois along Route 100 all the way north to Canton is a beautiful drive with many road side stands for fall produce especially apples and pumpkins.

You might like to drive south from McCormick’s Creek State Park close to Bloomington, Indiana to Nashville, Indiana and on down to Vevay, Indiana, on the Ohio River; you see beautiful scenery the whole drive should you prefer a later trip. This ride is a two and a half hour drive through the Indiana hills past pumpkin farms and apple stands. If you are lucky you might just find a few jars of homemade blackberry jam in some of the farmer’s markets.

What can be more relaxing than an apple fritter, persimmon pudding, caramel apples, cinnamon apple donuts, persimmon ice cream or cinnamon flavored coffee? One can treat themselves to all of the above during leaf peeping season in the Midwest. If you prefer to drive north; take a drive through Madison, Wisconsin and a stop for cinnamon apple fritters from the Greenbush Bakery; apple fritters are a perfect way to enjoy the remainder of your drive to Green Bay, Wisconsin. Make sure to take the eastern route because leaf peeping along Lake Michigan is extraordinary. If you plan to drive further north onto the Door County peninsula, where the fall colors peep through the beautiful evergreen trees, you might like to stop at the “Door Peninsula Winery” (<https://store.dcwine.com/winery/>) in Sturgeon Bay to pick up a couple bottles of their “Hallowine.” “Hallowine” is a sweet apple wine heavily spiced with cinnamon and nutmeg. I am not a wine drinker but I will indulge myself with a glass of “Hallowine;” which is bottled with the cutest orange pumpkin, black

Memories and Musings

By Cheri Sims



cat and witch label. This winery also has great shipping if you want a virtual trip.

Should you be looking for a week long leaf peeping trip, a drive to Mackinac Island, Michigan is a beautiful experience. Maple and Birch trees are bountiful on the drive on the island and the ride across the Straits of Mackinac gives one a colorful water view of the coast line of the main land and the island. You are in for a real treat when you stop for a slice of pumpkin Mackinaw Island fudge and a cup of hot freshly roasted coffee.

Another great week long leaf peeping trip is a drive to “House on the Rock” (<https://www.thehouseontherock.com/>) in Spring Green (about 350 miles), Wisconsin which is close to Frank Lloyd Wright’s famous house “Taliesin” (<https://www.taliesinpreservation.org/>). These two museums are the only museums with which we have visited multiple times and both are magnificent American history museums. While on this drive make sure to visit one of the “Peck’s Farm Markets” (<https://www.pecksfarmmarketeast.com/>) for a full blown autumn experience complete with a large corn maize, deer farm and plenty of good food.

The drive south from Spring Green through northern Missouri to Nauvoo, Illinois is a delightful leaf peeping drive. Nauvoo means “beautiful place” in Hebrew and it is truly that in the fall. There are many shops and houses to tour as well as their Scarecrow festival and “beautiful pumpkin walk” being held on October 3rd this year. The “Hotel Nauvoo” lodging is quaint and enjoyable and their buffet is outstanding. Make sure to try the

southern fried chicken, fried catfish, homemade French bread and cinnamon rolls. (<https://www.hotelnauvoo.com/?pg=Dining>).

Should you decide to drive east for a leaf peeping trip, I would suggest “Hawks Nest State Park in Ansted, West Virginia. We used to call this trip our Charleston, Illinois to Charleston, West Virginia trip and the state park is just forty miles south of Charleston, West Virginia. A stay at the state park lodge is comfortable, clean and affordable and the food is quite good. There is plenty to do at the state park besides hiking (we have hiked all the trails); boating, fishing, golf and swimming are offered. One can experience breathtaking views of the New River Gorge from most all the tables in the restaurant and the service is tantamount to that of five star dining. Be sure to stop at the “Java Beanery and Bakery” in Charleston, West Virginia for a fresh made hot scone and specialty teas and coffee.

Heading southwest just past Branson, Missouri is the quaint town of Eureka Springs, Arkansas (about 450 miles from our area; (www.eurekasprings.com)). I can’t say enough good things about Eureka Springs and we have visited there many times and have always been thrilled with the shopping, food and accommodations as well as the friendliness of the residents. One can shop for hours in their historic downtown and Eureka Springs boasts one of the most beautiful three story flat-iron buildings I have ever seen on all of our travels. (A flat-iron building is a triangular building with a street on both sides). Our last stay was at the “Cottages on Main Street” and as the name im-

plies this lodging is comprised of cute little restored Victorian cottages, some rooms have a balcony and a view of the downtown. Dining at “Myrtie Mae’s” (<https://myrtiemaes.com/>) s a tribute to heritage eating with hearty meals, homemade desserts and the best country fried steak ever!

The recipe I am sharing this week is Caramel Apple Coffee cake and we had it somewhere out in the country on our drive back from Eureka Springs, Arkansas. We were lost, it was getting late and we still had a couple of hours to drive to our hotel. We stopped into a small town café somewhere in the middle of Arkansas and this dessert was on their menu. Both Hubby and I had a piece each and then we bought two pieces to take with us. I searched for years to find a recipe and I found this on on the Southern Living web site. I know you will enjoy this coffee cake.

Happy leaf peeping!

Caramel Apple Coffee cake

½ cup softened butter, plus 2 Tbsp.
3 cups Granny Smith apples, peeled and sliced (about 3 large apples)
1 cup sugar
2 large eggs
2 cups all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons baking powder

½ teaspoon salt
1 cup milk
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
Streusel Topping
1 ½ cups all-purpose flour
1 cup chopped pecans
½ cup melted butter
½ cup firmly packed light brown sugar
¼ cup granulated sugar
1 ½ teaspoons ground cinnamon
¼ teaspoon salt
Caramel Sauce
1 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
½ cup butter
¼ cup whipping cream
¼ cup honey

Preheat oven to 350°F. Melt 2 Tbsp. butter in a large skillet over medium-high heat; add apples; sauté 5 minutes or until softened. Remove from heat; cool completely (about 30 minutes).

Meanwhile, prepare Streusel Topping and Caramel Sauce (see below).

Beat remaining ½ cup butter at medium speed with an electric mixer until creamy; gradually add sugar, beating well. Add eggs, 1 at a time, beating until blended after each addition.

Whisk together flour, baking powder, and salt; add flour mixture alternately to butter mixture with milk, beginning and ending with flour mixture. Beat at low speed until blended after each addition. Stir in vanilla.

Pour batter into a greased and floured 9-inch springform pan; cover top of batter

with apples. Drizzle with ½ cup Caramel Sauce (reserve the rest); sprinkle with Streusel Topping.

Bake at 350°F for 45 minutes. Cover loosely with aluminum foil to prevent excessive browning; bake 25 to 30 more minutes, or until center is set. (A wooden pick will not come out clean.) Cool in pan on a wire rack 30 minutes; remove sides of pan. Cool completely on wire rack (about 1 ½ hours). Drizzle top of cake with remaining ½ cup Caramel Sauce before serving.

Streusel Topping

Stir together flour, pecans, melted butter, brown sugar, granulated sugar, cinnamon, and salt until blended. Let stand 30 minutes or until firm enough to crumble into small pieces.

Caramel Sauce

Bring brown sugar, butter, whipping cream, and honey to a boil in a medium saucepan over medium-high heat, stirring constantly; boil, stirring constantly, 2 minutes. Remove from heat, and cool 15 minutes before serving. Store in an airtight container in refrigerator up to 1 week. To reheat, microwave at HIGH 10 to 15 seconds or just until warm; stir until smooth. <https://www.southernliving.com/recipes/caramel-apple-coffee-cake>.

Saturday is the autumn equinox

This evening, the Moon has moved farther eastward in its orbit around the Earth and sits near the reddish star Antares. It will be a first quarter Moon by Friday. That means there will be another open house at the CU Astronomical Society’s observatory Saturday evening (cuas.org) from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. The observatory is located southwest of Willard Airport, west of Tolono.

Saturday is also the date of the autumn equinox, the first day of the fall season. At 1:50 a.m. that morning, the Sun will be directly above the Earth’s equator and we will have roughly the same number of daylight

In the night sky

By David Leake



hours as nighttime hours.

For the early risers, you have the best morning view of the planet Mercury. It reaches its greatest separation from the Sun on Friday morning. Look for it low in the east just before 6 a.m., below and slightly left of

the much more brilliant Venus.

David Leake is retired Planetarium Director of Staer- kel Planetarium at Parkland College and co-founder of the Champaign-Urbana Astronomical Society, Inc.

How whole food got broken

Another part of the 125-year-old healthcare experiment I introduced last week is how our food supply and our relationship with food has changed. Processed food, cheap cooking oils and eating on the run are just a few examples of how we have changed during this 125-year time frame. In 1900, families ate all 3 meals a day together every day. In 2023, studies say we eat as a family an average of 5 meals a week!

In the US, our gravitation towards processed foods was accelerated in the 1940’s as part of the war effort in the Second World War. Even though there was little science of about food at that time, the

US government created a huge propaganda campaign that made everyone believe there was no difference between whole food and processed foods. These pamphlets pulled on our patriotic heart strings to choose the cheaper processed foods to help with the war effort.

Also, during this time, the US government was attempting to feed over 11 million soldiers involved in the war. This led to even more processed food development and propaganda surrounding how processed foods were actually superior to whole foods. This led to the development of things like TV dinners, sliced bread, enriched white flour, concen-

Real Life Wellness

By Dr. Bill Hemmer



trated fruit juices and instant coffee.

Couple all these things with the growing use of refrigerators in the 1930’s and 1940’s and you set up a situation where our diet changed from things you picked from your garden and killed daily, to putting food on a shelf or in the refrigerator for tomorrow.

Then, when the Second World War ended, instead of the processed food industries decreasing production, they turned their attention to the civilian market. The civilian market was already using these processed foods during the war effort but were being rationed. Once the war and the

rationing ended, people went crazy for it.

Processed food companies also used the emerging technology of TV to further make these foods the preferred option. Almost every TV show was sponsored by processed food manufacturers and the propaganda machine just kept on going from there. These foods were seen as fun and easy.

All these factors allowed the Food Industry to create a lifestyle around processed foods. This is why it has been so hard for people to break the habits around these poor food choices. Even though we all know these foods aren’t near as good for us as whole foods,

we continue to eat them because they are familiar.

Thankfully, our cultural norms are changing for the better. Social media is providing a new way for people to learn the truth about processed foods and over time, we will all work our way back to eating the way our bodies were meant to eat.

When you can couple eating whole food with movement and strong stress-handling practices within a loving, nurturing community, we will be able to build a healthy lifestyle that will make our world a better place.

Next week, I will dig into another important topic, movement.

Trip to the VA much more pleasant than expected

It was with no small amount of trepidation that I entered the VA Med center in Mattoon for the first time.

I too had heard the rumors of poor care, unfeeling bureaucrats and all the other horrors.

What’s this? A friendly face, smiling and welcoming me? So far, so good, but I’m sure I’ll be here for hours, waiting. Hold on! Did she just say “Mr. Hooker,” at exactly the time I was scheduled to be seen? That’s great, but now that I’m in the exam room, the true colors will show and I’ll be treated like a number, I’m sure.

I hear the nurse coming, so I brace myself, and she smiles and starts chatting about my day and asks me if I have any spe-

cific concerns. I mention a couple of relatively minor ailments, thinking that she’ll brush them off, but instead she mentions that she too has a sports related injury in the same location as mine.

She then chats about our common interest in sports and such while she takes my vitals, and the experience is noticeably pleasant. At least as pleasant as getting your vitals measured in a doctor’s office can be, I guess.

She then tells me that my next stop will be with my primary health care provider. OK, I figure, this is where I’ll wait for hours, until she can fit me in for a 30-second “exam” before sending me packing. We go

Hook, Line and Sinker

By Tony Hooker



next door and there sits my HCP, waiting for me. She’s already read the notes that the nurse had entered into my file, so she asks me a few more questions about it and schedules further tests. What? No trying to deny me service and save money at the expense of my health? No

making me feel worthless for even asking, like some of the horror stories I’ve heard? “What in the wide world of sports is going on here?” to quote the noted philosopher, Slim Pickens. She then proceeded to complete my physical, make a few changes to my scripts and set my next

step, which is to get a couple of x-rays. 22 minutes and I am out the door.

This time, I’m going to the VA in Danville. The mother ship. The behemoth. Surely, the ugliness I’ve heard so much about will rear its head over there, right?

I walk in cautiously with all the stories rattling around in my brain and approach the check in window in the Imaging department. Here it comes... a face full of attitude, right? Wrong, the nice lady behind the window smiles and greets me warmly, noting that I have a birthday coming up and asks if I have anything special planned. I do, so we discuss it a bit while she

checks me in. She seems genuinely pleased that I am traveling. I barely get seated and I’m called back to the lab. X-rays are taken and in 12 minutes, I’m free to go.

On the way out, a nice volunteer is handing out water and girl scout cookies, with a smile and a sincere thank you for my service. This? This is what I’ve heard tales of woe about? This is what made me so nervous? For me, the lesson I’ve learned is that everyone’s experience is going to be different. I am sure that not all appointments go as swimmingly as mine, but I am also sure that the VA is full of talented, caring professionals, and that’s nothing to be afraid of.