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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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AUTUMN LIMITS

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When is it autumn? The astronomers tell us the season began this year on September 23 at 12:46 p.m., eastern standard time. The program of autumnal events in the heavens doubtless began at that moment, with the passage of the sun over the celestial equator, but there are several "autumns" besides the astronomical one, which is delimited by the equinox and the solstice.

Popularly, in Germany, where spring is said to begin when the first stork comes back from winter quarters, autumn is often reckoned from St. Bartholomew's Day (August 24), but in Upper Silesia August 10 is called the "erste Herbsttag" -- the first autumn day. The British generally consider the season to embrace the three months of August, September and October, while in France it is sometimes said to extend from the end of August to the first fortnight of November. In North America, although the astronomical autumn is familiar, the season is more commonly considered to last from September 1 to November 30; and this period is recognized as autumn by meteorologists all over the northern hemisphere.

Phenologists, who gauge the progress of the seasons by the periodic events of plant and animal life, say that autumn begins when the autumnal coloration of foliage becomes general; and this, of course, does not happen on a fixed date but on dates that vary from place to place and from year to year.

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