

Fall shows off marvels of creation

I love fall. I have always loved this season.

I enjoy the cooler weather – which, as I write this, remains but a promise as we endure another string of 90-degree days. I’m not really looking forward to the cold days of winter, but for a few months, a light jacket suffices, and that’s OK with me.

It might be that fall is apple-picking season that harkens me back to bygone days. I recall often picking apples on Columbus Day, kicking through the dry leaves on the ground as we passed through the orchard.

I love watching the leaves turn, though I’ve not always been a fan of raking them. Now the leaves end up in our compost bins, to eventually become soil for our gardens.

When I was growing up, my dad planted a red maple tree in our yard. It wasn’t very tall to start, but eventually it towered over our small front yard. In the fall, its leaves turned golden and then red. People would stop to take photos of it. In its annual change of color, it was glorious – more beautiful than its normal green canopy.

I realized the changing colors of the leaves signals that they are dying off, that the tree is preparing for winter. But that beauty was captivating.

My dad and mom both passed away, and the new owners of the house recently removed that tree. We’re not sure if it was diseased or dying, or if they just wanted more space in the yard or don’t enjoy raking leaves. Whatever the reason, the loss of that tree, its shade and its fall beauty is disheartening.

Our local government does an annual tree giveaway in the fall. Last year, I selected a red maple sapling a couple feet tall. I carefully planted it in the back yard. My wife and I call it “Dad’s tree.” It grew at least a foot this spring, but heavy rains this summer let loose a river of rushing water through the back yard that flattened the tree.

We stood the little tree back up and staked it. It seemed to bounce back, and we’re

hoping it thrives and keeps growing. It's starting to lose its leaves now, though they're not the brilliant red color we hope to see eventually.

There's something about fall colors that inspires poetry and prose. Spring and summer have their greenery. The winter has its grays and whites. But drive the Baltimore-Washington Parkway or the roads of Western Maryland during the fall and you can't help but marvel at creation.

A bountiful harvest also awaits - apples and pumpkins and squash, oh my! So many recipes, so little time. That's where the apple picking comes in. My staff always loves it when my wife and I head to the orchards, because they know apple cake, apple blondies or apple pie, maybe even some pumpkin bread, will follow.

I know that fall leads into winter. I know colder days are ahead and that snow will at some point cover our neighborhoods and make life challenging in many ways.

But for now, let me enjoy this season for the senses: the vibrant colors, the crackling sounds and earthy smells of leaves underfoot. Bring on the flavors of the harvest and the memories of a tree at my boyhood home that burst into brightness every year, and I'll accept the shorter days and longer shadows.