



Fall reflections

PHOTO BY LYNETTE RAE MCADAMS

Fall arrives to Willapa Bay, near Oysterville, Washington.

The autumnal equinox's perfect point of stasis takes place Thursday, Sept. 22

By LYNETTE RAE MCADAMS

Spring is “in the air” for weeks with subtle signals, summer hangs in one long arc of leisure, and winter, when it comes, sneaks in with a slow but deepening chill. Unlike its seasonal counterparts however, fall seems always to arrive with a kind of suddenness — one day you’re basking in the full rays of summer,

and the next, as if by the throwing of some celestial switch, autumn has arrived.

Technically, fall begins for us this year at precisely 7:23 a.m. Thursday, Sept. 22, the exact moment that the plane of Earth’s equator will appear to pass directly through the sun.

This astronomical event, called an equinox, happens twice each year — in spring and fall — marking the days on which our

entire planet experiences a nearly equal measure of day and night.

Essentially a point of stasis on the great swing of the seasonal pendulum, an equinox is an occasion of perfect balance — the slack tide of time, if you will, when everything stands motionless, just before a directional shift. At the vernal equinox, that shift is toward the lengthening of days, but for the autumnal

equinox, currently our chief concern, the only way forward is with a mad descent toward darkness.

Take heart: There’s plenty of time between now and then; time, still, for fall to tap you swiftly on the shoulder, announcing itself with a special crispness to the morning air. Or perhaps it will find you in the garden, knee deep in what the pagans called the “second harvest,” a sacred time that

they commemorated during the festival of Mabon. A celebration of the equinox, Mabon was a time to honor the changing of the seasons — to give thanks for the sunlight that had nourished a bountiful crop, and to recognize and respect the coming darkness — in every way a happy nod to natural balance.

This year, as the shadows start to lengthen, as the fruits of summer’s labor beg to fill your basket, how will you partake in these days of equal measure? Will you be like the woodland squirrel, his every waking moment consumed with preparation for the coming winter?

Or more like the patient, swollen spider, who spins a single web and is content to wait for what fate brings her?

All things being equal, perhaps the best choice is to be like the salmon, who, having feasted beyond the river’s mouth throughout the long, lazy days of summer, senses at last a freshness to the falling rain. Taking this timeless cue, and without a backward glance, it makes the final turn toward home, filled with an ancient, instinctive wisdom: Our brightest days may already be behind us, but the deep, rich purpose of the season is yet to be.

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