

Ship Report Transcript

Friday, September 3, 2024

By Joanne Rideout

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It's time for the Ship Report the show about all things maritime. I'm Joanne Rideout. It's Tuesday, September 3rd, 20, 24. Well, I thought today that we could talk about seasons. Sunday was September 1st.

Kind of a slightly fraught time of the year for a lot of folks. Sort of the last gasp of summer in everyone's mind with it being Labor Day weekend and all. So it's symbolic, even though the season isn't really over by common benchmarks. But turns out it's not just us regular folks who feel this weekend it's the end of one thing and the beginning of another. Even though we talk about the vernal equinox happening later this month, that's usually thought of as the official beginning of autumn.

But according to one segment of the scientific community Sunday, we entered what weather experts call meteorological fall. So every year around this time, I talk about this weather oriented change of seasons that happens in September. It's a little bit fraught. I know this change of seasons from fall to winter seems to be, at least for some people, the most emotional time of the year in terms of seasons.

This transition seems to evoke a lot of reaction from folks even more than spring, at least here in the Pacific Northwest. It evokes childhood going back to grown up responsibilities, kind of the feeling you get on Sunday nights when the workweek is about to begin. Days are getting shorter, less sunlight like things are kind of closing in. We have hopeful feelings in springtime, but it's autumn when we get emotional. Some folks feel the loss of summer in those shorter days and more finicky weather and the temperature dropping. And they're kind of grieving that other people.

I'm one of those. I feel that, too. But along with it, a cozy feeling with the onset of cooler weather and shorter days. So these days make me feel like turning inward. Making a cup of tea and hunkering down a bit. I love fall, but I know it's not everybody's happy place. One thing is certain it's part of the annual cycle of seasons. I've watched our weather get more and more fall like in recent weeks, on and off, starting with one evening in mid-August, when I put my head out an open window, took in a breath and smelled fall. That too, happens every year that something in the air is real. I can't quite describe it, but I know it.

I could feel that the lush feeling of the summer season was fading and in its place, something more retrospective, more calm and settled, maybe more aware. So here we are, heading toward the fall and winter seasons, and at this time of year, I like to talk about this slightly complex question of when fall begins. It turns out this is not a trick question, but it is a little more complicated than just saying false starts on this day. Exactly. I think it's fun to talk about this and it shows that sometimes our frame of reference in life is everything. So often it's how we look at it. Whatever it is that defines our experience.

There are two basic ways to look at fall from a scientific perspective. One is from the point of view of an astronomer who studies the planets, the solar system, and the universe. And the other is, from the point of view of a meteorologist who studies weather. So there are astronomical seasons and there are meteorological seasons. Astronomical seasons are based on the position of the Earth in relation to the sun, whereas meteorological seasons are based more on the annual temperature cycle. Right now, if you talked to a meteorologist, they would say that we are indeed already in the fall season. An astronomer

would say kind of jumping the gun a bit to say that. And that fall starts on the autumnal equinox a day later in the month, when night and day are approximately equal in length. That's what Equinox means. Equi - nox – “nox” is “night” in Latin.

Astronomical fall, the one we learned about in school arrives on Sunday, September 22nd, 2024 at 5:43 a.m. our time Pacific time in the Northern Hemisphere. Of course, the equinox occurs at the same moment worldwide at different times in different time zones, so you adjust accordingly for where you are as far as meteorological fall.

Here's what The Farmer's Almanac, that annual publication about weather and agriculture says about meteorological seasons. Fall begins on September 1st and ends November 30th. Winter begins on December 1st and ends on the last day in February. Spring begins March 1st and ends May 31st, and summer begins June 1st and ends on August 31st. Astronomers, on the other hand, determine the seasons by the Earth's tilt. This tilt, a 23 degree slant. You remember that from your science classes in school makes it so the sun appears above the horizon for different lengths of time during the various seasons. The tilt determines whether the sun's rays strike at a low angle or more directly onto earth. This affects how long our days are and how warm it is. Wherever we are located on the Earth's surface. It's what gives us our seasons.

But that's not all the experts say about when fall starts. One of our most revered regional weather experts, University of Washington meteorologist Cliff Mass, talked last year in his weather blog about what he sees as the beginning of fall. And that blog, he said, “The meteorology of a region does not necessarily follow the calendar. And that is certainly true for the northwest. Meteorological autumn in the northwest generally starts in the last week of August with increasing precipitation and declining temperatures.”

So the key here for meteorologists who are monitoring the weather is that there is a marked temperature and weather shift that happens each year around the last week of August. Those of us who are inclined to stop and smell the roses, so to speak, have felt this coming. Another interesting note is that because of the Earth's tilt, that means that while it's going into autumn here in the northern hemisphere, in the southern hemisphere, spring is starting.

Now, if you're feeling blue about fall being here, other than hopping on a plane to somewhere in the southern hemisphere, you might keep in mind that this is indeed the annual cycle that happens every year. And in a few months spring will return. It's also true that we get some of our best weather after Labor Day when the shift in the sun's position in the sky causes those cold and afternoons and the weather can be soft and summery.

So get ready to savor those days, when we have them, as we seesaw our way towards solid autumn, when the norm will be rain and overcast. In the meantime, think about embracing this season, which calls us to look inward and perhaps be indoors more time to reflect and then get busy after the summer.

Time to make a good cup of tea or whatever beverage warms your heart. The Earth, for her part, is taking some time for a much needed rest so she can recharge and awaken with a light heart to cheer us in the spring.

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