

## Specialists wager on a colorful autumn

### Less leaf-shading fungus is present

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DURHAM, N.H. — A little less of a common forest fungus might help bring more of New England's celebrated fall foliage color this year.

Experts say they are seeing less of a disease called Anthracnose, or leaf blight, which is caused by tiny fungi. The fungi are so small they can be seen only under a microscope, but they can have a big impact on the forest and its color.

They make normally green hardwood leaves look brown, black or even scorched, and when prevalent, they can make a forest look dingy. Less Anthracnose this season means more chance for a

more brilliant season, according to the US Forest Service.

"Last year you could drive through the White Mountains of New Hampshire and for miles, the white birches were noticeably brown," said Margaret Miller-Weeks, a forest health monitoring specialist. "Today, throughout New England, the incidence of the disease is drastically less than the previous year."

In Massachusetts, Forest Health Program Supervisor Charlie Burnham spends much of his time examining trees. He said he noticed right away that signs of Anthracnose, so prevalent last year, were hard to find this summer.

Forest experts agree Anthracnose does not usually cause lasting harm. It just looks bad, like a blemish on the landscape.

But when it becomes too prevalent, causing repeated defoliation on the same trees, it can weaken and kill trees.

Leaf blight is one of several factors which can influence the brightness of foliage and the length of the leaf-peeping season.

Other factors include the temperature, humidity, wind, and rainfall.

