



Now is the season cherished above all others.

What of spring? Ah, spring on Cape Cod is little more than an idea; it comes and goes before you have a chance to take it in, here on the narrow land.

Lovely, but ephemeral, its golden promise, more often than not, drowned in chilly rains, blown out to sea on a raw gale. It may be winter's last gasp, but it's effectively ruinous to forsythia and daffodill.

What of summer? Those idyllic long days, all too frequently, are steamy, humid, too hot to breathe easily.

This is the time that's best of all. It is true there's rain now and then, but bad weather moves through quickly and comes, as a rule, only when needed most.

Now is the season of bright brisk mornings. You wake charged with energies you haven't felt since Memorial Day. The air is clean and dry; the gentle nip of it brings you out of slumber to wide awake in seconds.

Gone is the laze of August, induced by restless too-warm nights. Gone is the temptation to catch another nap before arising. Up-and-get-at-it may be one reason Labor Day was so named, for the urge to labor comes and is welcome of a cool September morn.

Later on, when winter sets in, you'll snuggle under the blankets as long as your schedule permits, for getting up will mean facing cold, icy rains, blowing snow. Each extra moment cuddling in the warmth of bedclothes will delay the moment you must face the harshness winter brings.

But there's nothing harsh about September. This is the season of bluest skies, goldest sunshine, greenest grass, brightest colors and clearest horizons.

Already the colors are beginning to blaze. The swamp maples are scarlet. The goldenrod sways. Pine needles drop and spread cinnamon carpets on woodland floors.

Mushrooms spring up overnight and, if you've done your homework, can provide a feast. Caution! Study your field guides and know what you're gathering.

All spring and summer you've promised yourself to get those special chores done; now is the time. Some of them aren't much fun, but this time of year you've got the energy, and there's only a few weeks left to finish them.

If you've a lawn, do your reseeding now, for shorter cooler days, frequent rainy nights, and blessed sunny noons are ideal for establishing grasses. Don't fertilize the shrubs this time of year; you don't want tender new growth frostbitten.

Do clean out the garage. Do scrub out the trash cans. Do prune tree branches that have grown enough over the summer to rub on the roof shingles. Once the leaves are off, if the bare branches are left to scratch and scrape all winter, you could have a leak, come spring.

Give the car a good wash and polish, and vacuum it thoroughly. It is time for the fall tune-up, too, to make sure it's trouble-free through bad weather to come.

Plan your fall trip. You've jumped and hurried through the heat of summer; now you deserve some pampering. Be good to yourself and pick your destination according to the foliage pattern. If you go now, head for Nova Scotia. If you leave in a couple of weeks, northern New England and New York State mountains will be radiant.

For late October vacationing, head for Pennsylvania, northern New Jersey, or even Delaware. Most New Englanders are oblivious to Delaware, and it's their loss, for this next-to-smallest of our fifty has much to offer.

The Delaware River Water Gap is unparalleled for scenic beauty; Longwood Gardens, near Wilmington, is worth a visit any time of year; Winterthur is an experience and an education in American antiques; New Castle is bicentennial village, come alive.

Perhaps you're energy-conscious and believe you shouldn't use the gas (Hooray for you!), and perhaps you're afraid of flying and hate buses. There's no law against vacationing close to home. Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket have a lot to offer, now the tourist season's

over; so do Orleans, Truro, even Provincetown.

Explore our neighboring state of Rhode Island. For a glimpse of the Victorian Age, take the ferry to Block Island from Point Judith. Be prepared for fog, wind, and eating lots of fresh fish. Unless you like watery clam chowder, order the soup.

Back to the chores: to help insulate your house and save fuel, bank your foundations with clean pineneedles raked from your lawn. Check your storm doors and windows as well as your furnace and the anti-freeze in your car's radiator.

Store your porch and lawn furniture and get the cellar organized. Prepare to mound up protective soil around your rose bushes and, when the ground's frozen, mulch your evergreens.

If you're a canning and preserving person, you're in full swing, this time of year. The tomato plants are producing the hundreds of crimson globes promised since June.

Cucumbers you failed to find until they were the size of small watermelons are perfect for pickling. Pepper plants are heavy with green lanterns, shining and satin-smooth. Freeze what you can't use.

Squashes of all kinds freeze well; and fruits are now ready for harvest. Unpicked pears are falling, rotting on the ground, and the bees are thick about them, gathering the sweetness to see them through the winter.

All too soon the brilliance of autumn leaves will fade, all too soon warm sunny days will give way to cool sunny days, and then cool cloudy days as October slips away.

All too soon cool cloudy days will become cold winter days -- busy ones as the holidays approach -- and the year comes full circle and draws to a close.

Now is the season cherished above all others. Sunrises compete with sunsets for variety and beauty. Harvest moon vies with high noon for spreading light and shadow over the landscape. Vegetable rival flower gardens for pickables; tree leaves challenge artist's palette to mimic nature's hues.

Now is the season we know our reasons for choosing the narrow land. Between now and the year's end, we'll see the best of our weather; we'll accomplish the most, feel healthiest, and cherish each sparkling day.

There's no finer time of year than September and October -- here on Cape Cod.