Fall Fest 2026



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Where to celebrate the fall season

Jacob Brindle | Video Editor

Alondra Hernandez Rodriguez/Niner Times

Cooler temperatures, changing leaves and Halloween events mean one thing: fall has returned to the Charlotte area. From corn mazes and medieval jousting to haunted trails and pumpkin patches, Charlotte offers many ways to celebrate the season. Whether you want a relaxed evening outdoors or a high-adrenaline haunted house, here are some of the city's biggest attractions.

Pick the perfect pumpkin

Pumpkin patches capture the fall spirit, and families looking for the perfect pumpkin won't have to travel far to find one.

Hodges Family Farm & Pumpkin Patch has served the Charlotte area for over a century, and this fall will add another year to the tally. Located on Rocky River Rd. in Charlotte, Hodges offers one of the city's closest traditional farm experiences, letting visitors pick their favorite pumpkin while enjoying the historic atmosphere. Hodges will be open for fall activities through Oct. 31.

Carrigan Farms in Mooresville is another fan-favorite option for those in the Charlotte area. Carrigan fully immerses visitors in fall festivities, offering hayrides through the patch before letting visitors choose their pumpkin. Charlotte on the Cheap ranks Carrigan among the top fall destinations. Reservations are required for Carrigan's pumpkin patch experience.

Get lost in a corn maze

Those seeking a challenge this fall can test their sense of direction in one of the region's many corn mazes.

Country Days Corn Maze, located in Indian Trail, North Carolina, offers multiple corn mazes for visitors to choose from, along with traditional fall activities for the family.

Further west, Shelby Corn Maze, located in Shelby, North Carolina, is celebrating its 26th anniversary in style, featuring an 8-acre, 250th-anniversary design honoring America.

Both attractions are family-friendly and will operate through Nov. 1.

Travel back in time

For Charlotte locals, fall is more than just pumpkins and corn mazes.

The Carolina Renaissance Festival has returned to Huntersville, North Carolina, for another season, transforming its grounds into a medieval village featuring themed food, performers, artisans and entertainment.

The festival runs every Saturday and Sunday from Oct. 3 to Nov. 22. Visitors can watch high-intensity jousting, shop at more than 140 traditional artisan shops, watch the ancient sport of falconry and eat like royalty.

For visitors looking to spend the season away from traditional fall activities, the Carolina Renaissance Festival is an ideal destination.

Get spooked at SCarowinds

As October grows darker, haunted attractions in the Charlotte area are gaining traction once again.

SCarowinds, a Halloween makeover for the amusement park Carowinds, has been a staple of Charlotte's fall festivities since 2000. After 26 years, SCarowinds remains a top destination for a good scare during the Halloween season. Visitors can enjoy the adrenaline rush of 14 roller coasters and get spooked by six haunted mazes. SCarowinds runs from Sept. 11 to Nov. 7.

Fall is just starting

Charlotte may be known for its skyscrapers and rapidly growing housing developments, but fall brings out a different side of the Queen City.

With many seasonal attractions running through the end of October and others through mid-November, Charlotte residents still have plenty of time to grab a coat and explore the area's fall festivities.



NT Playlist:
Fall into the season

Jhaz Afolabi | Staff Writer

Hailey Schenkweiler/Niner Times

Fall brings change: a change of season, a new semester and new surroundings. We can look forward to cooler weather, the beginning of the holiday season and cozy music to get us through the final stretch of the year.

The Niner Times has the perfect playlist for kicking leaves while walking to class or getting ready with friends for Halloween parties. The playlist has tracks ranging from alternative R&B to rock, pop and hip-hop. It's sure to include something for everyone.

Featuring big names like Drake and Daft Punk alongside smaller artists like Samba Jean-Baptiste and Evanora Unlimited, listeners can discover something new.

Fall brings change, and that can feel scary. Some students are leaving home for the first time, while others are figuring out their next steps after graduation. But this change can also bring new friends and experiences — and this playlist can provide comfort throughout the fall season.



FALL Bucket LIST

Kyle Boucher & David Morales | News Editor & Staff Writer
Camila Surinach Peralta/Niner Times

From relaxing at home to enjoying the cool weather outside, fall offers plenty of cozy and fun activities for students to enjoy. Many of these activities can be done with friends or family.

Baking

Baking fall-themed goods is a popular, cozy activity, especially when it comes to anything pumpkin flavored. Some staple fall foods include pumpkin pie, Halloween-themed cookies and anything with apple or cinnamon flavors.

Binge-watching

With Thanksgiving break around the corner, students finally have time to catch up on shows and movies released over the last few months. With a plethora of streaming services available, there is a wide selection of content to choose from.

Classic corn maze

Outside Charlotte's city center, many farms offer corn mazes for the fall season. A great activity for friends, getting lost in a maze of tall corn can be a fun way to spend the day. Corn mazes vary in size and complexity; students should research which type fits their preferences.

Friendsgiving

A Friendsgiving feast is a more informal version of Thanksgiving and involves eating food, playing games and spending time with friends rather than family. Friendsgiving can be hosted on campus in dorms or apartment rooms, or off campus at a restaurant.

Haunted houses and trails

As Halloween approaches, many haunted houses and trails are open throughout North Carolina. These festive locations are built to scare customers and build Halloween spirit. Haunted houses can be standalone buildings or parts of existing buildings used temporarily during the Halloween season. A haunted trail uses the same scaring concept, but outdoors, often on a farm or in a large open space. Students can also join a local haunted house as an actor and scare others.

Pumpkin carving

A classic fall tradition, pumpkin carving is a staple activity every year. Some people carve pumpkins with family; others hold carving competitions with friends. Pumpkin carving offers creative freedom, letting you create faces, designs or words on a pumpkin. Putting a light or candle inside and placing it as a decoration is also very common.

Scary movie night

Get together with friends, grab a snack and put on a scary movie or a cheesy 80s thriller. The horror genre has many classics to choose from, such as "Halloween," "The Shining," "Friday the 13th," and more. For many friend groups, sitting around a TV late at night and getting scared in the dark is a classic fall tradition.





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Guide to Trader Joe's dorm-friendly fall snacks

Annie Waskey | Staff Writer

Fall has arrived at UNC Charlotte, bringing a new wave of seasonal food to grocery stores. Here are six dorm-friendly snacks from Trader Joe's —just a 10-minute drive from campus — to carry you through the season.

Pumpkin Tortilla Chips and Fall Harvest Salsa

These tortilla chips really do taste like pumpkin, which is honestly strange. However, they pair well with the Trader Joe's Fall Harvest Salsa, which keeps well in a mini fridge. The pumpkin, butternut squash and apples blend nicely, and the snack feels fitting for the season.

Maple & Sea Salt Kettle Corn

While the maple flavor is almost undetectable, it still makes a great snack to bring to class or movie night with your roommates. It doesn't taste much different from regular kettle corn, but if you're a kettle corn fan, this snack is definitely for you.

Pumpkin Cranberry Crisps

These are a perfect snack for a library study session or to keep on hand. These crackers are good on their own and pair well with any dip, like Trader Joe's Caramelized Onion Dip. The pumpkin flavor is subtle, and the dried cranberries add an interesting texture.

All Butter Apple Shortbread Cookies

These shortbread cookies are a great on-the-go treat. The buttery shortbread pairs well with the bright apple flavor. They satisfy an apple pie craving without the effort.

Petite Pumpkin Spice Cookies

What's not to love about a sugar cookie, especially when it's shaped like a pumpkin? While they are on the sweet side, these pumpkin spice-flavored cookies are the perfect sweet treat to keep in your dorm. They're also a great snack for a fall movie marathon on your dorm hall's floor.

Apple Crisp Milk Chocolate Caramels

These chocolates offer the perfect pick-me-up after a long day of classes. The apple flavor and the crunch inside the chocolate coating really do mimic an apple crisp, and the chewy caramel is a great touch.

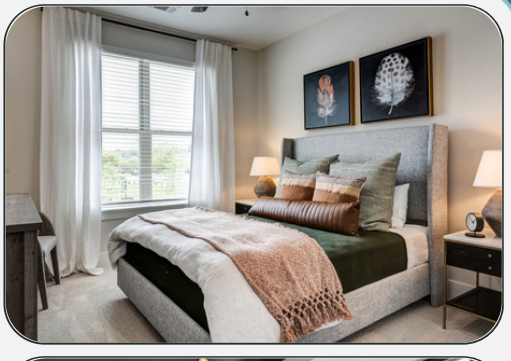


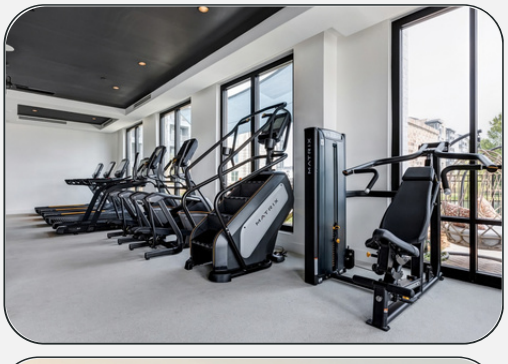
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BOOK A TOUR

Queen City fall coffee crawl

Montserat Marcelo-Morales | Staff Writer

It's October, and with fall here and cooler weather settling in, coffee shops on or near campus have started to offer seasonal fall drinks to the public.

Below are the seasonal drinks that coffee shops near the University are offering.

Boobys

Boobys is located on campus near the David R. Ravin School of Architecture, Monday through Thursday. Students can pay with their declining balance or a debit card.

Seasonal menu items include the Iced Pumpkin Chai and the Blackberry Flockfizz, a fresh take on a virgin mojito using seasonal fruit.

Thoughtful Cup

Thoughtful Cup, located on the bottom floor of Fretwell, is celebrating fall with a few special drinks of their own:

Their seasonal menu features a Pumpkin Creme Latte, which can be ordered iced or hot, a Butter Pecan White Hot Cocoa, a Spiced Honey Cold Brew, and Pumpkin Pie Dirty Chai — similar to a pumpkin chai, but mixing the chai with a shot of espresso instead of the usual black tea concentrate makes the chai "dirty."

Vavela Cafe

Vavela Cafe is located near the McCullough Commons shopping center. They are known for integrating Turkish culture into their coffee.

They offer a Pumpkin Pie Latte, Pumpkin Frappé, Salted Caramel Latte and Pistachio Latte.

Their menu also includes seasonal food items, like an Iced Pumpkin Loaf and a Sweet Potato Pudding topped with walnuts.

Hilltop Coffee

Hilltop Coffee is a Black-owned coffee shop located near Mallard Creek.

They offer a classic Pumpkin Spice Latte with pumpkin syrup, whipped cream and cinnamon on top, a Butter Pecan Latte with butter pecan syrup and orange spice, and an Apple Butter Chai topped with apple butter cold foam.

Their Salted Caramel Cold Brew has salted caramel syrup with cold foam on top for an extra-sweet caramel taste.

Haraz Coffee House University

Haraz Coffee House University is a shop inspired by Middle Eastern coffee culture, located in University Executive Park.

Their seasonal latte flavors include Apple Cinnamon and Pumpkin Spice, each of which offers a sweet and spicy taste. Their lineup also has a Crème Brûlée Latte.

Along with their lattes, they also have a Pumpkin Pie Frappé and a Pumpkin Spice Shaken Espresso.

Qamaria Yemeni Coffee Co.

Qamaria Yemeni Coffee Co. is a Yemeni- and women-owned business located across from the JW Clay Blvd Station.

Their fall offerings include an Iced Pumpkin Spice Latte, and an Iced Carrot Cake Matcha, made with carrot cake syrup and matcha, topped with cinnamon.



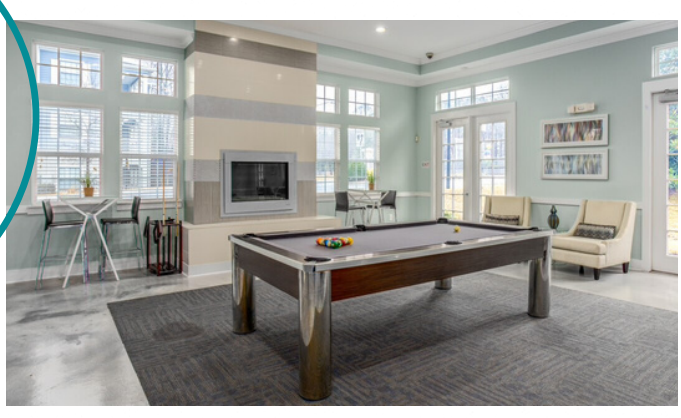
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Sweater weather (or not)

Emsley Jackson | Opinion Editor

It's fall, y'all! It may not feel like fall every second of the day — not yet, at least — but if you crack your window after the sun goes down, or actually dare to walk to your 8 a.m., you might notice it. In North Carolina, fall is the watched pot that never boils. We get excited for pumpkin spice lattes and Halloween in July, but our pools are still open in October. This doesn't mean that autumn isn't real, but if you think too hard, you'll miss it.

Summer and winter are the dominant seasons in this state, with the oppressive heat never too far away and the grayness of January-drab outliving holiday cheer. People are wwweither ready for these seasons to begin or beyond ready for them to end. Autumn, however, is a vibe the collective dreams of year-round.

Fall is a state of mind. There's the physical: school is back in session, temperatures are dropping, leaves are falling, days are shortening and everything feels seasonal. But what really makes the season real is its mental aspect. Your soul seeks out that communal warmth. Your heart wants to find meaning in the apple spice and blustery days. Your mind invites the idea of wearing that sweater. Fall is about balancing mind and matter in our lives to find a golden-brown center. Something like that anyway; perhaps I'm thinking too much about apple pie.

So, soak it up while you can! Our fall foliage exists from late September to sometime in November. Mother Nature is a watercolor artist whose work goes on display for a limited time each year before returning to the ashes to be born anew. Go study her work. Use foliage maps to pinpoint where her best collections are at the moment. Be basic: eat pumpkin everything because it's good and because you love it. This season goes by quickly; if you blink, it'll be December, then May, and then — if you're lucky enough — October all over again.

Keeping this in mind, I invite you to remember these sentiments the next time you complain about it being 75 degrees in October, because while that may be our reality, the true reason for the season is always and forever in our hearts.



Ava Weaver/Niner Times

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