

Lesson 6: Adjusting Color

Suppose you took a picture of beautiful fall leaves. It was amazing, with all the beautiful fall colors, and you want to show your friends. When you open the photo on your camera, however, it looked dark and dreary. There are some presets in modern cell phones that let you do some color adjusting, but most won't allow you to fine-tune the way GIMP will.



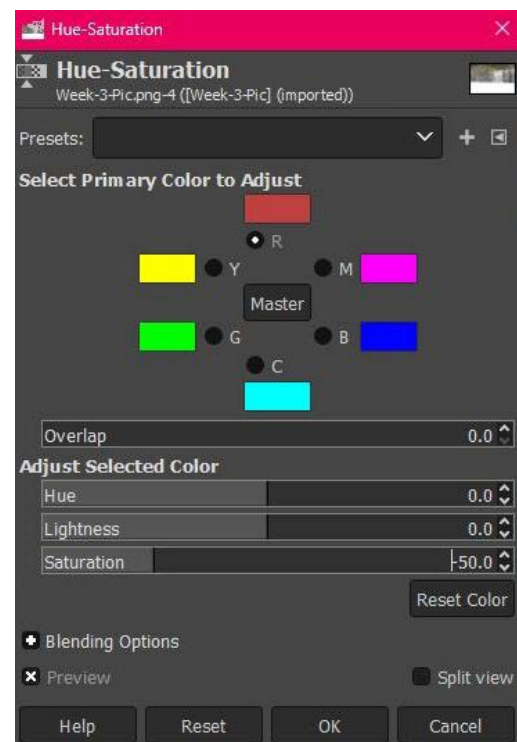
This uses the file “Editing Photos with GIMP Lesson 6 fall leaves.xcf” if you would like to follow along.

➤ Colors > Hue-Saturation

This allows us to select a color, and then adjust the hue, lightness, and saturation for just that color. There are six, but they deserve a bit of explanation.

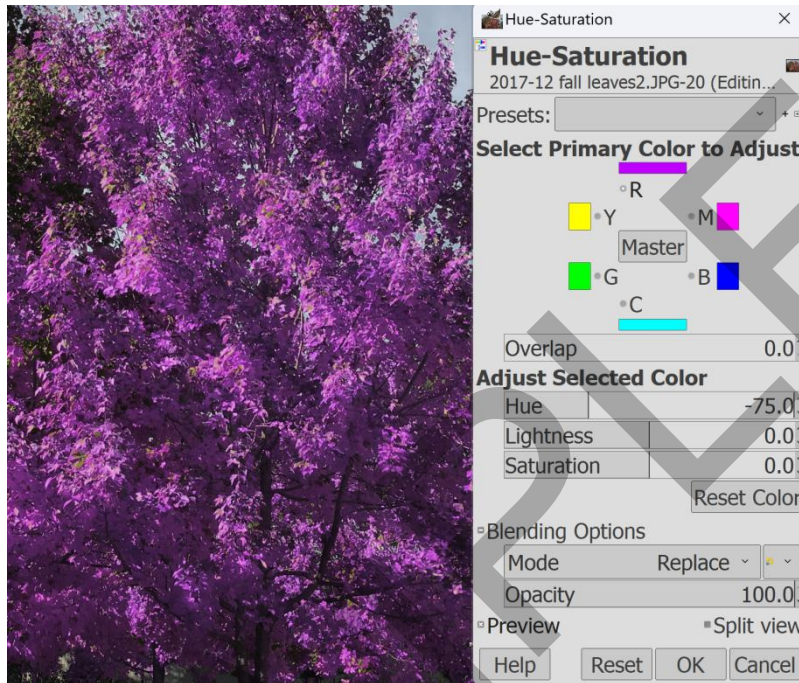
Your standard color space is **RGB**, which stands for Red – Green – Blue. Every color can be blended by *adding* some combination of those three. Another way to blend color is by *subtracting*, and that model uses **CYMK**, which stands for Cyan – Yellow – Magenta – Black. Black is included in the lightness, so it's not represented in the color wheel.

Since you may not know which process was used in the photo's creation, it is helpful to try several options when you are making adjustments.



If you wanted to make this photo entirely desaturated, all you would have to do is remove the saturation for all six colors. If you wanted to just turn down the saturation somewhat, you could do that, too, by adjusting the sliders or the numbers.

You could make the photo look really wild by changing the most prominent hue. For example, if I select red and then slide the hue slider to -75 , I could make a really odd dream-forest.



More helpful for this photo, however, will be the Brightness and Contrast tool.

➤ Colors > Brightness-Contrast

That will bring up another dialog box to play with. For the image to be brighter with more contrast, slide both sliders to the right until it looks right. This version used a Brightness of +31 and a Contrast of +51.

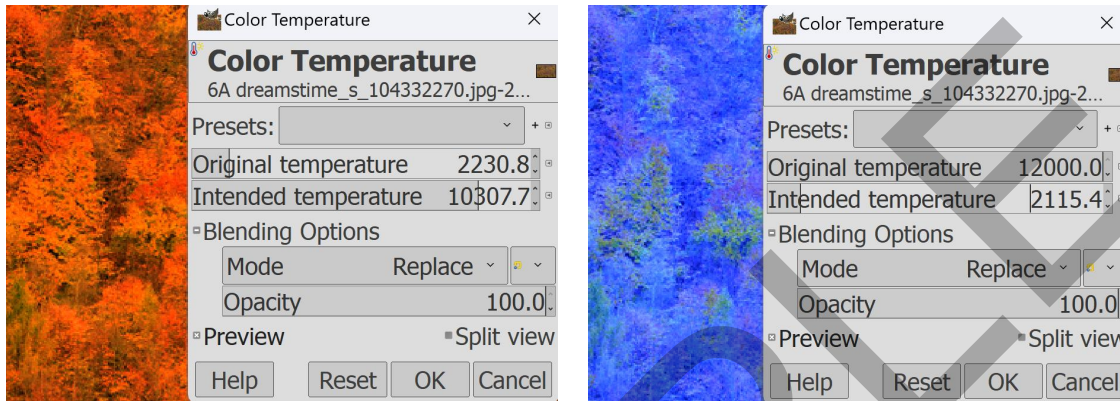


If you also go back to Colors > Hue / Saturation and turn up the saturation on the yellow and red channels, it will make the colors even more vibrant.

You can also play with the Color Temperature to make the image extremely warm (red/yellow) or extremely cool (blue/green).

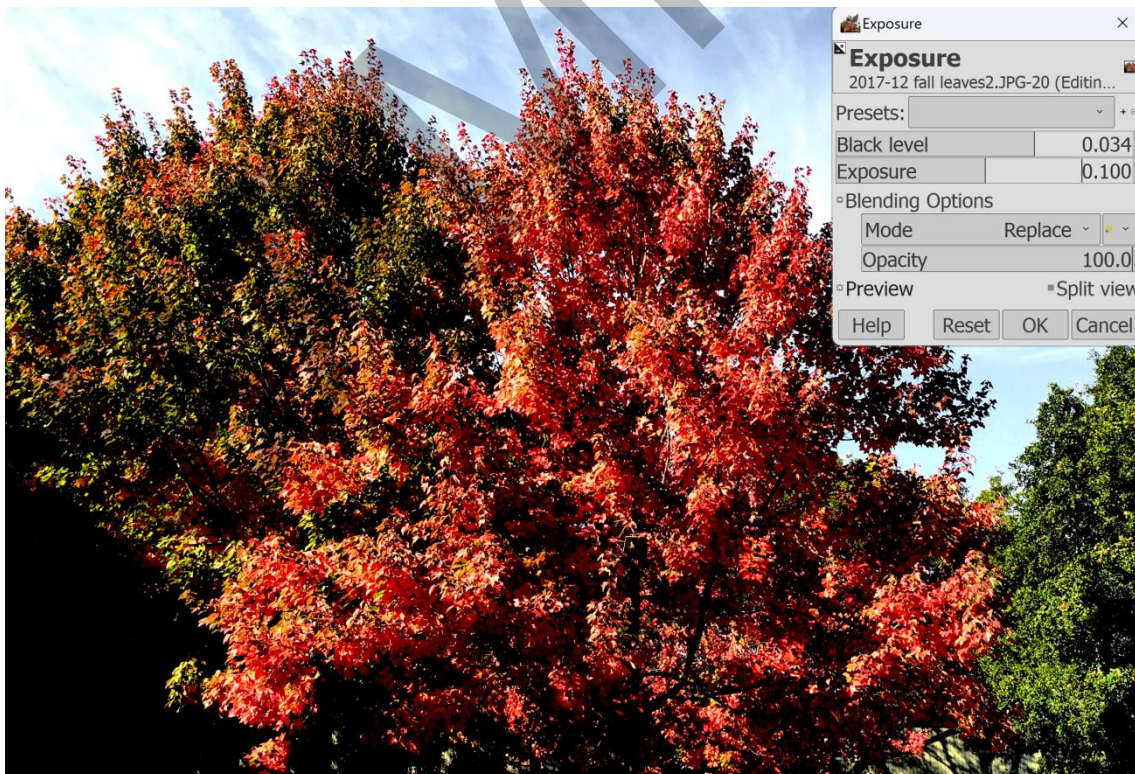
➤ Colors > Color Temperature

Most of the time, you will be sliding the original temperature and the intended temperature sliders in opposite directions. Here is the result on a different fall scene. See what it looks like on yours.



➤ Colors > Exposure

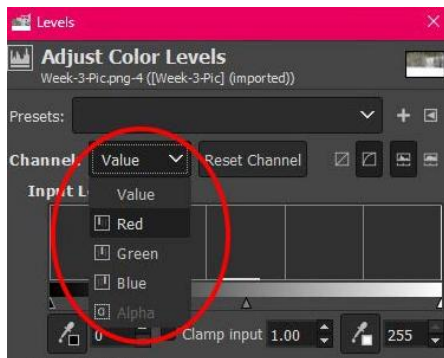
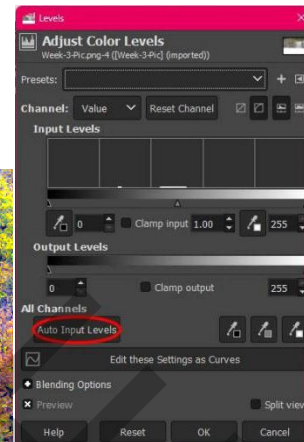
Playing with the black level and exposure sliders can give good results as well.



➤ Colors > Levels

This method of changing color levels gives you one more option for adjusting the colors in your photo. The first selection you should try is the Auto Input Levels, circled in red under the words, All Channels.

If it gives you some odd colors, just click undo and try again.

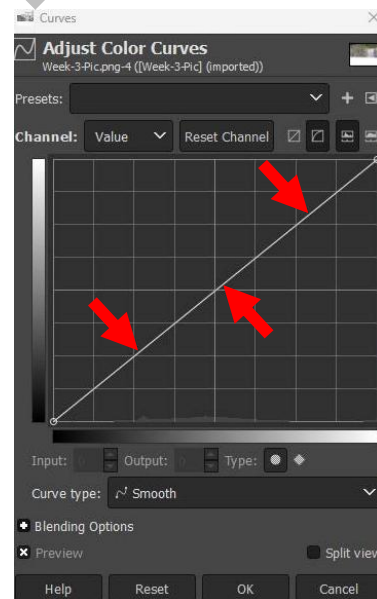
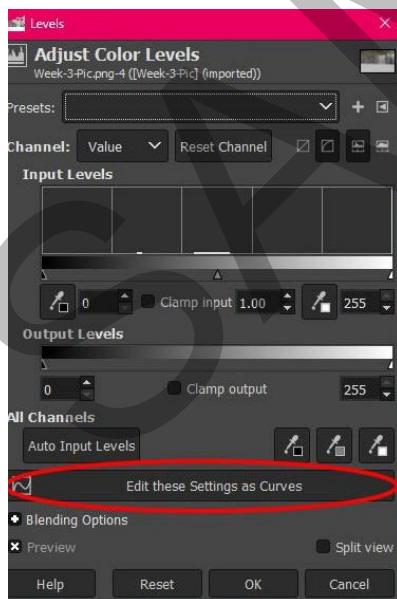


This time, when you select Colors > Levels, select the drop-down menu named Value (left, beside the word Channel).

Choose Red, then click OK. This is a common setting which will brighten and/or sharpen many photos. It didn't work on this one, so we will edit the settings as curves instead.

This time, go to Colors > Levels > Edit these Settings as Curves (circled toward the bottom of the image, below on the left).

This will bring up a new dialog box titled "Adjust Color Curves" (below on the right).



Now you may click and drag anywhere on the diagonal line to form a squiggly curve. Dragging the line up will make that color value lighter, and down will make it darker. Play with it and see what you come up with!

Exercise 6A

Open the original image “**Editing Photos with GIMP Lesson 6 fall leaves.xcf**” (not the version we changed in the lesson). Make the following changes and save each as a new file with the exercise number (for example, “Exercise 6A-1.xcf”).

1. Desaturate all colors with Colors > Hue–Saturation, and then adjust Colors > Brightness–Contrast to make the image as clear as possible. Save the image and open a new copy of the original.
2. Using Colors > Hue–Saturation, make the reds, yellows, and greens as vivid and bright as a sunshiny day, without needing sunglasses. (Again, save and open a new one...)
3. Using Colors > Hue–Saturation, make the colors look all wrong – purple, or magenta, or however you please. (Save.)
4. Using Colors > Brightness–Contrast, adjust the sliders until the image looks vivid. (Save.)
5. Using Colors > Color Temperature, make the image warmer or cooler. Save your favorite.
6. Using Colors > Exposure, play with the black level and exposure to create an image that you like. (Save.)
7. Use Colors > Levels > Auto Input Levels and save the result.
8. Use Colors > Levels > Edit these Settings as a Curve to make your favorite version. (Save.)

Now answer the following in your journal.

9. Which of the methods of adjusting colors did you find the easiest to use?
10. Which of the methods produced the image that you liked the best?

Exercise 6B

Repeat Exercise 6A with one of your own photos or with any of the images from Lessons 1–6.