



Don't Fear the Goldenrod!

By Sue Gwise, *Horticulture Educator*

As a native species, goldenrods (*Solidago* spp.) are powerhouses when it comes to supporting native insects. The blooms provide an enormous amount of pollen and nectar late in the season (August – October) when there aren't many other options. Many goldenrod species become quite tall, providing a backdrop that gives gardens a natural feel.

For these reasons, we love to recommend goldenrods. But we often get a flat-out dismissal of the whole *Solidago* genus when we say "this is a good species to plant." Reading this, you may even be thinking, "why would anyone intentionally plant these allergy triggering plants"?

STOP right there – it is a common misconception that goldenrod causes late summer hay fever! Goldenrods are *insect pollinated*, which means that they don't spew irritating pollen into the air. How did goldenrod get its undeserved reputation?

The problem is that the allergy friendly goldenrod blooms at the *same time* as the evil, allergy-producing plant, ragweed. Goldenrod blooms are showy, yellow sprays of flowers. Ragweed is a boring green weed with green flowers that blends in with everything else. We blame the plant that is most conspicuous.



Ragweed plant



Ragweed leaves and flowers

Ragweed is *wind pollinated* and, therefore, it produces copious amounts of lightweight pollen which floats easily through the air and up our noses. Goldenrod pollen is heavy and sticky – it is designed to be carried by insects, not the wind. One ragweed plant can produce 1 *billion* pollen grains, and there is never just one plant in a given location. The ability of ragweed to grow on almost any site and the fact that seeds can remain viable in the soil for up to 80 years, cause the plant to be very prolific.

So go ahead and plant, or encourage, goldenrod. It may even outcompete that nasty ragweed!

- Showy Goldenrod (*Solidago speciosa*) reaches a height of about five feet and blooms August through October. It will tolerate medium to dry soils.
- Stiff Goldenrod (*Solidago rigida*) is four feet tall and blooms August through October. In addition to dry soils, it will tolerate wetter soils than showy goldenrod.
- Canada or Common Goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis*) is commonly seen growing on disturbed sites and in abandoned pastures. It matures at about five feet and also blooms August through October. It prefers well-drained soils.

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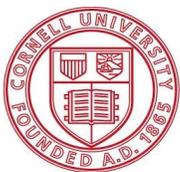
Goldenrod blooms attract bumble bees, solitary bees, specialty bees, butterflies, moths, wasps, flies, beetles, and hummingbirds. They are also larval food plants for several species of butterflies and moths.



*A stand of ragweed in a meadow-
quite unremarkable*



*Bright and cheery goldenrod is often mistakenly
blamed for seasonal allergies*



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