

Don't Blame the Goldenrod!

Written by Lynne Bernstein

It's that time of year when seasonal allergies we call hay fever are triggered by wind-dispersed pollen of *Ambrosia*, native ragweed. Many people blame hay fever on goldenrod (*Solidago* sp.) because its bright yellow blooms are so conspicuous during hay fever season, however, ragweed is the real culprit. Both goldenrod and ragweed are in the aster family and often grow wild together in the same places, along roads and in fields. They both also bloom in late summer. But that's where the similarities end.

Ragweed is an annual that must produce millions of seeds in order to ensure the species survival from one year to the next. Ragweed is wind-pollinated: the wind blows the pollen from one flower to another. Because it does not rely on insects for pollination, it doesn't have to attract them with bright, showy flowers that promise nectar rewards, or pollen that sticks to their bodies. In fact, ragweed flowers contain no nectar and their pollen is very light and easily airborne. The flowers are small and quite inconspicuous, appearing more like buds than flowers.



[Goldenrods](#) are native perennials that come back year after year and require insects for pollination. Its bright yellow blooms advertise rewards of nectar and sticky pollen to late summer pollinators. Goldenrod's heavy pollen is not easily blown around so it's unlikely to be the cause of seasonal allergies. There are nearly 100 different species of goldenrod native to the US. They are considered a "keystone species" by Dr. Doug Tallamy whose research has found that goldenrods provide food and shelter to over 120 species of insects. In addition, many bird species rely on goldenrod seeds well into the winter when other food sources are gone. Some species of goldenrod are considered too aggressive for home gardens but there are many others [species and cultivars](#) that are well-behaved and deserve a spot in every pollinator-friendly garden.

