

By Kylee Baumlee

Fall has absolutely positively arrived, both officially and unofficially. The wondrously cool nights and crisp clear days when the warmth of the sun feels good on our backs instead of making us sweat is a welcome relief from the hot, dry summer. The leaves are beginning to turn those lovely shades of red, gold, and orange and the frost is on the pumpkin. And those of us that have seasonal allergies are sneezing and itching and coughing.

Most of us with those kinds of allergies know that it's ragweed that's the biggest culprit right now, but do you know what ragweed really is? I'm here to tell you what it ISN'T.

You know those beautiful golden plummy things that are blooming right now in the fields and along the roadsides? That's goldenrod, one of our most beautiful fall wildflowers.

It's not ragweed and it's not the cause of all your allergy frustrations, in spite of what you may have believed all these years. In fact, goldenrod pollen is too heavy to be carried by the wind, and some forms of goldenrod contain a powerful herbal ANTI-allergen for those who suffer from seasonal allergies. Take THAT, ragweed!

While it's true that allergies flare up about the time goldenrod blooms, it's because ragweed blooms at the same time. And ragweed isn't nearly so glamorous, despite belonging to the genus *Ambrosia*. (There's a cruel joke, eh?) It has boring green spikes of tiny blooms and you really wouldn't give it a second look, even if you were taking a slow, leisurely stroll down a country road. Ragweed pollen is particularly irritating, due to its spiny exterior, and though it's found in every corner of the country, it's more plentiful in the eastern US and the Midwest. In fact, the Midwest has the honor of having the most ragweed pollen of anywhere on earth.

The bad news is that because our climate is changing, the hay fever season is becoming longer. And more bad news – if you think you can avoid ragweed pollen, think again. It's generally too small to be caught by common filtration masks (who wants to wear those,

anyway?) and it's heaviest during the hours of 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., so unless you can stay inside with windows closed, you're out of luck.

And you know how we all love the smell of bed sheets that are dried on the clothes line? Don't do it. The pollen gets embedded in the sheets and then you're just sleeping in the stuff all night.

Yeah, I know. I'm not helping, am I? So let's talk about goldenrod some more. Our native *Solidago canadensis* is in the Aster family. It's the Kentucky state wildflower (Nebraska, too) and many in the Appalachian areas use it to make tea to combat fatigue.

You can grow it in your gardens and many people do. There are hybrid cultivated varieties as well, such as 'Peter Pan', 'Fireworks' and 'Golden Baby'.

The CREW (Conservation and Research of Endangered Wildlife) Center at the Cincinnati Zoo is working to bring back a specific goldenrod – *Solidago shortii*, named for Charles Short, who discovered it in 1840, growing on an island in the Ohio River. It's one of the rarest plants in the world. Once considered to be extinct, it's now on the Federally Endangered List after a small population was rediscovered in Kentucky in 1939. Another small crop was located in southern Indiana in 2002.

So, don't blame the goldenrod for your sniffing woes. Enjoy it for its sunny disposition and natural beauty it gives the landscape. Appreciate that it's a great source of food for butterflies and bees. You might even want to grow some in your own garden.

Read more at Kylee's blog, Our Little Acre, at [www.ourlittleacre.com](http://www.ourlittleacre.com) and on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/OurLittleAcre](https://www.facebook.com/OurLittleAcre). Contact her at [PauldingProgressGardener@gmail.com](mailto:PauldingProgressGardener@gmail.com).