

Ragweed vs. Goldenrod

Clearing The Confusion For Allergy Sufferers

Many people with allergies blame plants for their misery (rightfully so), and summertime can be tough for hay fever sufferers. Hay fever is an allergic reaction that certain people have when they inhale pollen from specific plants. During summer, one of the most colorful plants we see blooming in roadside ditches is goldenrod (*Solidago* sp.), and since hay fever symptoms seem to be worse when it is in bloom, it is often blamed for causing hay fever. However, the true culprit is ragweed. Both plants begin blooming in late summer, but are actually quite different in many ways.

Goldenrod produces masses of bright golden flowers on single-stemmed plants, and has relatively large, heavy pollen grains that are intended to be carried off by bees, butterflies, and other pollinators. Ragweed bears greenish yellow flowers in small heads which produce copious amounts of pollen, carried by the wind rather than insects for pollination. Ragweed flowers are not showy which means these plants are often easier to recognize by their stems and leaves. Ragweed has branching purplish stems that are rough and hairy, and leaves which are smooth, but deeply divided into lobed portions.

Since 75 percent of all Americans who are allergic to pollen-producing plants are also allergic to ragweed, removal of this pest plant is important. Homeowners can control this shallow-rooted plant best by hoeing, hand-pulling, or mowing while plants are still young,

particularly before their flowers begin to form. Select herbicides for use on broadleaf weeds can also provide control, but should not be used in right-of-ways and ditches since other wildflowers are likely present.

Hopefully this information will help you to identify ragweed on your property and will allow all of us to breathe a little easier this time of year.



The deeply lobed leaves of ragweed (shown left), purplish stems, and inconspicuous green flowers help to distinguish this plant from the goldenrod plant (shown right) which has un-lobed leaves and bright, showy golden flower plumes.

Photos courtesy of Alicia Lamborn

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