

## GOLDENROD GETS A BAD RAP

By Lyn Chimera

Contrary to popular belief goldenrod does NOT cause hay fever! The pollen of goldenrod is sticky, so it's not light enough to be carried in the wind. When bees and other pollinators visit goldenrods, the pollen sticks to their legs and is carried from plant to plant by the insects, not affecting humans at all.

Most people consider goldenrod a weed and would never even think of adding it to their garden however it's one of my favorite plants. What would fall be like without its beautiful yellow color? It's a North American native in the aster family. There are about 100 species of goldenrod 4 of which I grow in my garden (see plants listed below). It's a beautiful plant with a lot of food value for nature. It's a great cut flower too, often included in florist's bouquets.

The name goldenrod comes from the beautiful golden color of its flower and its stiff rod like stem. The beautiful bright yellow blossoms brighten up many a fall field. For me it was always a signal that the start of another school year wasn't far off.

There's actually an official color called goldenrod, which is a bright, vibrant yellow.

Besides its beauty at the end of the summer, goldenrod provides nectar for bees, flies, wasps and many species of butterfly as well as being a food source for many butterfly larvae. The stem of the goldenrod forms a gall or bulbous firm tissue mass around the invading larva. The larva feed on the tissue inside these galls. Some beneficial insects lay their eggs in these galls which then feed on the larva. Woodpeckers also feed on the larva by pecking a hole in the gall and eating the larva. It's a great example of the circle of life. It's fun to show children these galls in the winter. Some will have woodpecker holes in them indicating the larva has been eaten. Those

that don't have the hole can be cut open to reveal the larva inside.

Thomas Edison experimented with goldenrod to produce rubber from the sap in its leaves. The model T that his friend Henry Ford gave him had tires made from goldenrod! During World War II goldenrod was processed as a source of rubber, but it proved to have poor stretching qualities and was discontinued. Goldenrod also has some medicinal qualities. Herbal medicine practitioners use it as a kid-



ney tonic and Native Americans chewed the leaves to relieve sore throats and the roots to help toothaches.

It's interesting to note that in Europe goldenrod has been a welcome addition to garden beds for a long time. In the US, however, most people consider it a weed. It's only been in the last 30 years that people have begun to appreciate its beauty in their gardens. Those of you who like to attract butterflies may want to include a few goldenrod plants in your garden.

The ones I grow are:

**Common field goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis*)** is a great garden plant for full sun. Nothing seems to bother it, including deer.

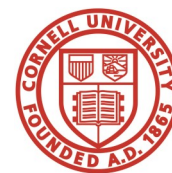
**Zig-Zag goldenrod (*Solidago flexicaulis*)** has an interesting growth pattern, the stem actually had a slight zig and zag between leaves and it doesn't seem to

spread as fast.

There's even one for shadier areas, **Blue stemmed goldenrod (*Solidago caesia*)**. It has a lovely arching habit with the blooms growing along the stem.

Of the ones I grow, Fireworks goldenrod (*Solidago rugose*) is my favorite (see photo from my garden p. 1). It is such a striking plant. It has the same bright yellow color but the flowering branches shoot out from the stem and really look like fireworks! People often stop and ask me what the beautiful yellow plant in the front is. They are shocked when I tell them it's goldenrod!

Goldenrod seeds freely and also spreads by its roots. To avoid spreading, simply cut off the blossom heads right after the blooms fade and before the seed is set. Give one a try. You'll love it and so will the birds and bees!



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