

Are You Allergic To Ragweed?

So you are pretty sure that you are allergic to ragweed. How do you stay away from something if you don't even know what it looks like? Where can I find a picture of the offending plant?



This is young common ragweed. It doesn't look fiendish, it kind of looks like a carrot top or a fern.

This single plant can send out 1 BILLION pollen grains. My eyes itch just thinking about it.

I've never seen just one plant by itself. It always has friends with it.



This is what the plant looks like when it is flowering. This is the stage where it causes misery to allergy sufferers.

As the days grow shorter the ragweed matures and releases pollen. Pollen counts are highest shortly after sunrise until about 10 am. The pollen is tiny and can travel up to 400 miles from its source. It has been measured in the air 400 miles out at sea and 2 miles high in the atmosphere.

Common ragweed grows up to 5 feet tall. It has hairy stems and light green leaves, up to four inches long. There are 17 varieties of ragweed and one is known as giant ragweed. (See picture below of the ragweed almost as tall as the farm building).

Ragweed grows in fields, gardens, roadsides, and unkept places. It is an annual, which means it only lives for one season. Ragweed flowers are yellowish-green and small. They grow in clusters up to six inches long near the top of the plant. (See above picture.)

Of Americans who are allergic to pollen-producing plants, 75% are allergic to ragweed. People with allergies to one kind of pollen often develop allergies to other pollens.

People with ragweed allergy may also get symptoms when they eat cantaloupe and bananas, chamomile tea, sunflower seeds and honey containing pollen from any of the ragweed family, so caution should be used when consuming these items especially during ragweed season when your immune system is already hyper sensitive. Use caution when smelling marigolds, or chrysanthemums or pyrethrum insecticide.

Other plants in the Ragweed family include:

- Sunflower
- Ragweed, Cocklebur, Marshelder, Franseria (Ambrosieae)
- Sneezeweed, Marigold, Feverfew (Helenieae)
- African daisy (Arctotideae)
- Calendula (Calenduleae)
- Straw flower (Induleae)
- Aster, Goldenrod, Groundselbush, Desert Broom (Astereae)
- Ironweed (Vernonieae)
- Dog Fennel, Joe-pye Weed (Eupatorieae)
- Chamomile, Yarrow, Pyrethrum, Chrysanthemum, Wormwood, Sage (anthemideae)
- Ragwort, Butterweed (senecioneae)
- Thistle, Burdock (Cardueae)
- Gerbera Daisy (Mutisieae)
- Chicory, Lettuce, Dandelion (Cichorieae)

Now you understand why you feel so crummy when ragweed starts to bloom. Between

ragweed itself and all of its relations it's a wonder we can breathe at all.

Stay in a filtered environment whenever possible, where it is air-conditioned or there is a negative ion generator around to help minimize the effects of the pollen. Remember this will only last until a killing frost. Then there will be relief. Try and keep a sense of humor. Get yourself a **Wanted** Poster for Ragweed at: <http://www.dep.state.pa.us/dep/deputate/airwaste/aq/pollen/docs/poster.pdf>

Arm yourself with knowledge; be aware of what the pollen count is in your area by going to <http://www.pollen.com/Pollen.com.asp>

Ragweed isn't all *bad*; it does actually serve a purpose. It is a good source of food and cover for wildlife. Cottontail rabbits eat the plants, and insects, such as grasshoppers, eat the leaves. Some birds which eat ragweed seeds include: Meadow Vole, Dark-eyed Junco, brown-headed Cowbird, Northern Bobwhite, Purple Finch, Mourning dove, American Goldfinch, and Red-bellied Woodpecker.

So if your neighbor is cultivating a ½ acre crop of ragweed, and you can't convince him to mow it down, maybe you can start a bird preservation area to take care of his crop.



Notice the ragweed is no longer carrot sized. It is almost as tall as this out building.

The other option is to try these tips on Reducing **YOUR** Exposure to Ragweed Pollen:

- Get to the source of the pollen in your neighborhood. Make certain that your own property is free from ragweed. Enlist the support of neighbors to check nearby vacant lots. Participate in any community efforts to eliminate the weed. Report the presence of ragweed to local health authorities.
- Avoid being outdoors in the morning hours between 5 and 10 am. When pollen dispersal is peaking.
- Control the pollen in the air you breathe at home and work. If you plan to install an air conditioner or dehumidifier, be sure the unit has an appropriate filter. Get yourself a genuine negative ion generator by going to <http://www.negative-ion-generators.com> You even get 10% off when you buy two one for home and one for the office. They also have car ionizers.
- Keep the car windows closed during travel, especially in the country.
- If possible, spend your leisure time away from lots and fields where ragweed grows.
- Go to the beach for a vacation.
- Perform outdoor activities immediately following a rainfall, when the pollen has been washed from the air.
- Avoid hanging laundry outside on the line to dry. Pollen will collect on the sheets and clothes and make you miserable. Even if the sheets smell wonderful.

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Close up of ragweed plant

- Shower and wash your hair before sleeping. This way you don't transfer pollen from yourself to the bedding.
- Avoid insect sprays, tobacco smoke, air pollution, and similar irritants that will aggravate pollen allergy symptoms.
- Avoid certain foods that can compound ragweed symptoms including: honeydew, cantaloupe, watermelon, banana, and chamomile.



Ragweed is rarely seen as a single plant.



Beautiful crop of Missouri ragweed.



Now that you know what I look like, defend yourself.