



# State herb nothing to sneeze at

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DOVER — In the fall, our fields are studded with the golden yellow flowers of our native goldenrods (*Solidago* spp.). Yet, in spite of their beauty, goldenrods get no respect! How often have you heard the warning, "Stay away from goldenrods because they cause hay fever?" No! No! No! Goldenrods do not cause hay fever.

How, you may ask, did goldenrods get such bad press?

About the same time that goldenrods bloom with their conspicuous flowers, the inconspicuous green and brown flowers of ragweeds (*Ambrosia* spp.) also bloom. While goldenrods are pollinated by insects, ragweeds release their abundant pollen to the winds.

Allergic individuals probably never notice the ragweeds until their pollen is inhaled, causing subsequent sneezing, swelling, and headaches. Goldenrod pollen can show up in airborne pollen samples, but it is rare. Well, I suppose you could get an allergy from goldenrods if you stuffed the flowers up your nose, but otherwise it is unlikely that you are sensitive to goldenrods.

Goldenrods are great peren-



Submitted photo

**Contrary to popular belief, goldenrod is not an allergen. It's pollinated by insects, not by the wind as ragweed is**

nials for the garden. Most are native to North America, although only about 21 species are native to Delaware. Heights of goldenrods vary from almost prostrate to well over 8 feet. In these times of dry summers, I appreciate the drought-tolerant *S. sphacelata*, "Golden Fleece," which grows to only about 18 inches with compact growth and rounded leaves. Two other good cultivars are *S. canadensis* "Crown of Rays" and *S. canadensis* "Golden Baby," which grow to about 2 feet high. I especially like *S. rugosa*, "Fireworks," which as the name implies, looks like golden fireworks.

Did you know that the sweet goldenrod (*S. odora*) is the state

herb of Delaware? This was selected in 1996 because it is native to Delaware and has leaves scented of French tarragon. Since then, a few more states have selected state herbs (e.g., Maine has the wintergreen or teaberry, *Gaultheria procumbens*), but Delaware was the first.

*Editor's note: On the campus of Delaware State University, the Claude E. Phillips Herbarium is Delaware's center for research, education, and outreach about plant identifications, locations, and uses. Call 302-857-6452 (Dr. Susan Yost) to arrange a tour of the Herbarium, and call 302-857-6408 (Dr. Arthur Tucker) for more information about this article.*