Get to know Goldenrod

Looking for a great plant to support pollinators? Say hello to goldenrod!

A hardy native plant with many different species adapted to a wide range of growing conditions, there's a goldenrod that's right for every garden. And when you plant goldenrod in your yard, on your balcony or in a community garden, the birds, butterflies, bees and other pollinators will all benefit.

To set the record straight: goldenrod does not cause hay fever. Ragweed, in bloom at the same time, is the hay fever culprit. Goldenrod is insect-pollinated. It has heavy, sticky pollen that doesn't fly on the wind, so adding goldenrod to your garden will not cause discomfort to hay fever sufferers.

The Goods on Goldenrod

- There are more than 25 species of goldenrod native to Ontario.
- Goldenrod supports more than 100 species of moths and butterflies in their larval stage.
- More than 35 species of bees are specialist feeders on goldenrod pollen.
- Goldenrod blooms in late summer into the fall, and its nectar is an important late-season food source for pollinators.

Goldenrods for Shade

These species grow naturally in forests and are great for shady garden areas.

Photo: Lorraine Johnson

Zig zag goldenrod *(Solidago flexicaulis):* Broad, dark green leaves with saw-toothed edges. Growth form is upright; stems have a bent, zig-zag pattern. Spreads by underground rhizomes and multiplies, though not aggressively. Delicately scented blooms are bright yellow in many small clusters where the leaves meet the stem. Grows well in large containers on a shady balcony.

Blue-stemmed goldenrod *(Solidago caesia):* Tolerates somewhat dry and sandy soils. Long stems arc outwards in a circle, with bright yellow flowers in clusters held close to the stem. Leaves are narrow with serrated edges; stems have a waxy coating that tinges them blue. As it matures, forms a large clump.

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Goldenrods for Part-Sun

These adaptable species, from sun to part-sun, do well in the dappled conditions found under some types of trees.

Gray goldenrod *(Solidago nemoralis):* Extremely tough. Flourishing in gravelly soil, it's a great container plant, too. Stems and leaves are covered in dense, velvety white hairs. Pyramid-shaped flower clusters arrayed at the end of stems.

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Silverrod *(Solidago bicolor):* One of two goldenrod species in Ontario with white flowers instead of the usual yellow. (The other is *Solidago ptarmicoides*.) Growth form is upright, with large leaves at the base becoming smaller towards the middle. Flowers cluster tightly around the central stem of the leafless top half of the plant.

Goldenrods for Full Sun

These species are very drought-tolerant and thrive in open, sunny areas.

Grass-leaved goldenrod *(Euthamia graminifolia):* Long, slender leaves and a flower cluster that is branched and "flat-topped," rather than pyramid or rod-shaped; airy, elegant appearance. Can become "top heavy," so grow it alongside other tall meadow plants for support.

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Early goldenrod *(Solidago juncea):* Flower clusters look like tasselled golden pyramids. Long and thick, leathery green leaves form a cluster at the base of the plant, from which the tall stem emerges in summer. Usually the first goldenrod to bloom, often in early August.

Stiff goldenrod *(Solidago rigida):* Excellent showpiece, with broad leaves and stout stems that are velvety with short white hairs. Clusters of dense and abundant yellow flowers. Thrives in hot, dry conditions. Grows to an impressive size.

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Goldenrods for Sunny and Wet Areas / Rain Gardens

Ohio goldenrod *(Solidago ohioensis):* Thrives in moist areas—near a downspout or a low area, for example. Flower cluster is flat-topped, open and airy. Stems are upright and stout.

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Tall goldenrod *(Solidago altissima)*, **Canada goldenrod** *(Solidago canadensis)*, and **Giant goldenrod** *(Solidago gigantea)*: These three species are very similar in appearance, and are likely to volunteer in gardens, with seeds blowing in on the wind. All have three prominent veins on lower leaves, and tassel/pyramid-shaped flower clusters. Can be vigorous, and even aggressive (spreading by underground rhizomes), but can be managed by pulling up stems or growing in containers.

Myth: Goldenrod is too aggressive for the garden.
Myth-buster: Three species of goldenrod--Canada goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis*), Tall goldenrod (*Solidago altissima*) and Giant goldenrod (*Solidago gigantea*)--are highly successful spreaders in small gardens. In large gardens or tough spots where little else will grow, this is a very useful feature! In small gardens, consider planting some of the other beautiful goldenrods listed in this brochure.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Some species of goldenrod are rare in the wild. (Don't dig up any plants from natural areas!)
- Native goldenrods are exceptionally valuable for pollinators, providing nectar and pollen in late summer through fall. Goldenrod provides crucial fuel for migrating butterflies such as monarchs, and for queen bumblebees preparing for winter.
- Goldenrods support a broad array of beneficial insects, and some of the relationships between goldenrod and insects have evolved to be specialized and dependent.
- Many species of goldenrod grow tall. If you'd like to keep it shorter, try this trick: in late June or early July, cut the stems back by half. It will keep growing, becoming bushy, and will still flower in late summer, in a more compact form.
- You can grow goldenrod in a pot on your balcony or deck. Try these species in containers: Silverrod *(Solidago bicolor)*; Gray goldenrod *(Solidago nemoralis)*; Grass-leaved goldenrod *(Euthamia graminifolia)*; Zig zag goldenrod *(Solidago flexicaulis)*; Early goldenrod *(Solidago juncea)*; Tall goldenrod *(Solidago altissima)*; Canada goldenrod *(Solidago canadensis)*; Giant goldenrod *(Solidago gigantea)*

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