

Itchy eyes, running nose – it must be ragweed season

Taking antihistamines, keeping windows closed and getting rid of plants are ways to help reduce symptoms

As one of the estimated 6.2 million Canadians who suffer each year from seasonal allergies, you know the invisible, wind-blown pollen released by ragweed can be your number one enemy.

But what's your best defense against ragweed?

The Allergy/Asthma Information Association suggested you learn what ragweed looks like, find it and

then remove it from your environment.

Tear it out by hand – preferably before it flowers and produces seeds.

The following facts will help you pinpoint ragweed and eliminate the enemy:

- Ragweed is most prevalent in Southern Ontario, Quebec and the

Western Provinces;

- It can tolerate most kinds of soil and is found mostly in moist soils, fields and along roadways;

- It is characterized by hairy stems with shallow roots that grow one to six feet tall;

- The fern-like smooth leaves are two to four inches long;

- Two kinds of buds bloom from August to the first frost; greenish male buds appear at the tips of the stems and produce vast quantities of pollen.

Female buds are less visible since they bloom in the axles of the leaves;

- Alone, one ragweed plant can release more than one million pollen grains a day, so it is worth removing from your property. Collectively, the plant is responsible for one-third of allergens in the air during its flowering season;

lasts until October or until the first frost. So keep checking.

Besides removing ragweed, your next best defense may be an antihistamine.

To reduce the amount of pollen around you, you should do the following things:

- Since invisible ragweed pollen is carried by air currents, placing proper air filters on cooling and ventilation equipment in your home and using room size air purifiers can

be effective;

- Vacuum your carpets and upholstery frequently;

- Keep windows and doors closed as much as possible;

- Plan your most strenuous activities in the afternoon – ragweed pollinates very early each day increasing airborne pollen levels;

- After outdoor activities, shower and change your clothes;

- Avoid hanging your laundry outside to dry during ragweed season. (NC)

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Ragweed has fern-like leaves. NC • Ragweed season

Antihistamines work best when taken in advance

You've had it. Spring brought itchy, watery eyes as the trees came out in bud. Cutting the grass in July was followed by bouts of sneezing.

Now it's ragweed season and you're experiencing chronic stuffiness and your nose won't stop running. You're suffering from headaches, sleepless nights and you awaken with a dry cough. Some days there's even buzzing in your ears.

But ragweed isn't the biggest offender – rather it's the culmination of weeks of irritation.

Sufferers who tough it out at the beginning of

the season, (using antihistamines only occasionally), often have a much harder time later on.

That's because already-inflamed tissues are particularly sensitive to subsequent irritation. The allergy cycle spirals in intensity.

"Antihistamines work best when they are taken in advance, before exposure to allergens," said pharmacist and medical writer, Stephanie Sinden.


"Once tissues are inflamed, exposure to irritants such as pet dander, smoke, pollution or cold can aggravate the symptoms. By having a low level of drug in your blood stream before exposure to an allergen, it is often possible to manage the allergy with less medication overall."

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