

The Pollen

Issue N°13 -Ambrosia sp.

With autumn right around the corner, it only makes sense to talk about the most well-known allergen, the infamous ragweed! Ragweed belongs to the Asteraceae family, Ambrosia genera, the four most common varieties being: Giant, Short, Southern, and Western. The giant, short, and western varieties of ragweed are cross-reactive with one another, while the Southern variety tends to stand alone. As noted in a previous issue of The Pollen, ragweed can also be cross-reactive with a variety of foods, which may cause symptoms of Oral Allergy Syndrome, such as itching and swelling of the mouth. Other members of the Asteraceae family include: Cocklebur, Dog Fennel, Sagebrushes, and Mugworts.

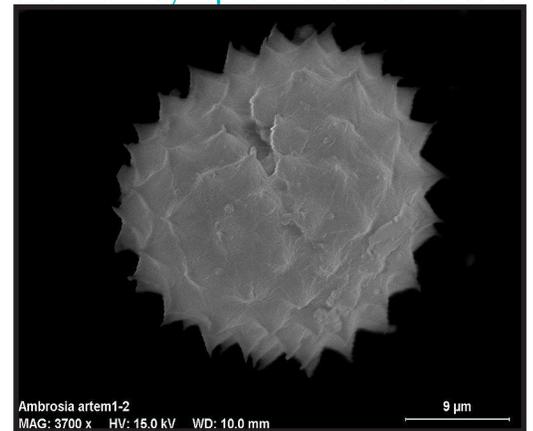
Why: Ragweed is considered one of the most allergenic offenders, estimated to affect nearly 26% of all Americans. ¹ As with all pollen, Hay Fever or rhinitis is the main symptom after contact or inhalation of ragweed.

Where: Ragweed is native to almost the entire continental United States, avoiding only very arid regions. Depending upon the type of ragweed, they prefer to grow in disturbed soils, waste sites, stream sides, roadsides, and ditches. ²

When: Ragweeds typically pollinate between July and October/November or whenever the first frost happens. Pollen counts typically peak in late summer, and are benefitted by warm, sunny, windy days. Conversely, ragweed counts tend to drop after rain and on cold mornings. Due to the changes in our climate over the past 20 years, the length of the ragweed season has increased up to 26 days longer in some parts of the continent. ^{1, 3}

Pollen: Ragweed pollen are spherical, small in size (15-25 μ m), 3 or 4 pores and furrows, and spined. Due to the small size the pollen has been detected up to 400 miles away and up to 2 miles in the air. ⁴

If you are allergic to ragweed, starting immunotherapy well before the start of its pollination season may help to decrease your allergic symptoms.



1. Climate Change Indicators in the United States. <http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/science/indicators/society-eco/ragweed.html>. Accessed Sept. 2013.

2. Weeds of the South. Bryson CT, DeFelice MS, eds. University of Georgia Press. Athens, GA. 2009

3. Ragweed Allergy. Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America. <http://aafa.org/display.cfm?id=9&sub=19&cont=267>. Accessed Sept. 2013.

4. Middleton's Allergy. Seventh Edition. 2009.