



Ashford Pollinator Pathway News

By Jennifer Sterling-Folker, September 2024

Greetings Ashford! Fall is a great time to add native plant perennials to your garden & the National Federation of Wildlife's Native Plant Finder (<https://nativeplantfinder.nwf.org/>) can help you identify the best native plants for supporting butterfly & moth caterpillars on your property. Type in Ashford's zip code & their website gives native plant suggestions ranked by the number of butterfly & moth species that use them as host plants for their larval stage. The plant suggestions include flowers, grasses, trees & shrubs as well as information on which butterflies & moths the plant supports. You can also save your favorites to your own list in the website.

Top flower suggestions for our area include **Goldenrod** which supports 123 butterfly and moth species (and does NOT cause Hay fever – see side bar), **Wild Strawberry** which supports 77 (along with many birds & small mammals), **Woodland Sunflower** which supports 58, & **Joe-Pye Weed** which supports 30. These are also excellent pollinator plants &, except for Wild Strawberry, are all late Summer bloomers currently brightening our roadsides & meadows. Top tree suggestions include **Oak** which supports a whopping 470 species (which is why Doug Tallamy's book, *The Nature of Oaks*, argues it is our most essential native tree), **Chokecherry** which supports 410 species, & **Willow** and **Birch** with 377 & 376 species respectively. Top shrubs include **Cranberry** and **Blueberry** which supports 276 species (&, like Wild Strawberry, also supports birds & small mammals), **Serviceberry** which supports 114, **Arrowwood** which supports 110 & **Meadowsweet** which supports 86 (as well as being a great pollinator plant).



These & many other species-supporting native plants are available at **Native Plant Trust's Garden Shop** in Framingham, MA, which typically begins their fall native plant sale at the end of August and the sales continue until the shop closes for the season in October. **Earth Tones Native Plant Nursery** in Woodbury, CT is another dedicated native plant nursery with a wide selection of native plants. Our very own **Ashford Garden Center** on route 44 reopened August 23 with a limited selection of restocked native plants for the fall. Or you can buy bare root plants or seeds from online native plant nurseries such as **Prairie Moon** (<https://www.prairiemoon.com>) or the **Wild Seed Project** (<https://shop.wildseedproject.net/>).

If you are interested, we also have free seed packets for a variety of native plants including **Milkweeds** which supports 12 butterfly & moth species, **Asters** which support 11 species, **Wild Bergamot** which supports 10 species, **Sneezeweed** which supports 6, & **Mountain Mints** which supports 5 species. Some of these plants are easy to grow from seed in the first season, but others require cold stratification – a period of cold temperatures to break their dormancy cycle. If you would like any seed packets, just email me directly with a request (jsfolker@yahoo.com) & I can mail or drop them off to you.

In Defense of Goldenrod

No, it's not Goldenrod – the beautiful yellow flower stalks growing along roadsides & meadows at this time of year -- that is causing your fall allergies to flare! Its Ragweed which produces lots of air-borne pollen & often grows near Goldenrod, but goes unnoticed due to its drab & unremarkable appearance.



Meanwhile Goldenrod is a perennial which spreads through underground rhizomes. Its pollen sticks to pollinating insects & is too heavy to go airborne, so it's not the cause of seasonal allergies.



Still, the misconception continues! In a recent native plant blog post, a gardener noticed that "on a recent trip to a local drugstore, I observed antihistamines that are STILL being sold with an image of goldenrod on the front of the box." Next time you are sneezing near a Goldenrod, be sure to look around for the REAL culprit 😊

Have you checked out the website **AshfordCTOutdoors.org** yet? It's a handy guide to Ashford's outdoors including its walking trails, playgrounds, scenic roads, historic trails & road, water access & so much more! It's great to see all the outdoor activities our beautiful town has to offer!