

Leaflet

Your Connection to Nature  Medina County Park District

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Glorious Goldenrods

By: *Shelley Tender, Interpretive Services Manager*

Summer's end is marked by the fading of some of our more vividly colored summer wildflowers such as monarda, ironweed and Joe-pye weed, and the beginning of the fabulous display of our fall flora – asters and glorious goldenrods.

There are over 100 known species of goldenrod in North America, and, depending on who you talk to, 20-22 of those species occur in Ohio. They thrive in open areas such as roadsides, meadows, and prairies and can be found across the continent, including Mexico. Identifying individual species can be tricky. Many species are distinctive, but several others are quite similar and overlap geographical distributions.

For the most part, goldenrod flowers are golden-yellow in color, giving rise to their common name. There is one species that is white, appropriately dubbed silverrod, but it isn't as common as some of the other species found in our area.

Collectively, goldenrods are a “be-everything-to-everybody” plant. No joke, they serve a plethora of purposes in our ecosystem, and humans have found them useful for innumerable reasons. Here are eight worthy reasons, or at least interesting ones, why goldenrods get a gold star as one of the most beneficial plants to have in our natural landscapes and why we should add them to our home landscapes as well.

- 1) Goldenrod leaves are edible. They are feasted upon by a number of larval Lepidopteron species, and humans can use the dried leaves to make herbal tea. In fact, it was largely used by colonists after the Boston Tea Party as part of their “liberty tea” blends.
- 2) Goldenrods are among the most important late-season pollinator plants. Migrating monarchs depend on the nectar to fuel their journeys south, and many species of native bees use the pollen to provision late-season nests.
- 3) Inventor Thomas Edison experimented with using the goldenrod leaves' milky sap to produce rubber. His research was extensive, and he developed a species with leaves containing 12 percent latex. Experimental trials continued after his death, but, ultimately, synthetic rubber proved less costly to produce.
- 4) Goldenrods don't make you sneeze! While the large, showy flowers look like they should be allergen factories, the pollen is too heavy to be dispersed in the wind. You can blame ragweed, a more inconspicuous plant that releases its pollen into the air and right up your honker.
- 5) Goldenrods serve as small community neighborhoods for numerous multi-appendaged arthropods like moths, spiders, beetles, wasps, flies, etc. Here, they can find places to eat, seek out mates, and secure living quarters.
- 6) Historically, goldenrod was a panacea for maladies. It was used to calm bellyaches, soothe sore throats, relieve toothaches, heal wounds, treat diseases like diphtheria and tuberculosis, helped to counter inflammation in the kidneys that lead to kidney stones, and dull the sting from bees.
- 7) Fall décor would be bland without goldenrod. It fills out a fall vase arrangement nicely and looks exceptional in a wedding bouquet. It can even be used as a dye for fabric, creating a most pleasing yellow-gold color as long as you use a mordant to bind the dye to the fabric.
- 8) Honey bees! Goldenrod is considered one of the most important “bee plants” since the bees collect large amounts of goldenrod nectar prior to winter. Nectar is most plentiful during years with ample moisture and plentiful warm, sunny days.



Enjoy the splendor of the season and earn awards by completing at least eight designated hikes between September 1 and November 30. To participate, pick up a Trekking Through Autumn form at Medina County Park District Headquarters, Oenslager Nature Center, or simply print one at www.MedinaCountyParks.com.

Den Sites Constructed for Reptiles and Wildlife

By: *Jim Spetz, Natural Resource Manager*

If you've ever wondered where snakes go during the cold Ohio winter months, the short answer is underground. The long answer would be lots of different places including: rocky outcrops, old wells, abandoned basements, mammal burrows, and even ant mounds. Moreover, it is quite common to find multiple different species of snakes overwintering together in these locations and even sharing the space with other animals like salamanders and frogs. It's not uncommon for some of these overwintering congregations to be quite large, with some even numbering in the hundreds. Congregating like this may provide some benefits to these animals, but it may also indicate that ideal overwintering sites are limited in some locations. These often-maligned reptiles play a very important role in the ecosystem, keeping populations of pests, like voles and other small mammals, in check. Aside from human persecution, populations of many snake species have declined greatly over time. In particular, snake species that lay eggs are especially vulnerable to abundant predators like raccoons and skunks that sniff out these easy meals with a keen sense of smell. Believe it or not, our most common snake species (e.g. eastern gartersnake, Dekay's brownsnake, and northern watersnake) actually give birth to live young, with eggs completing their development inside the mothers' body cavities.

So, to help our scaly friends, this summer the natural resource department staff constructed three snake hibernacula to provide safe winter den sites for reptiles and other wildlife. These simple underground chambers were built into south-facing slopes at three different park district properties. A chamber was excavated beneath the frost line and in close proximity to the water table. The chamber was then loosely filled with various items including salvaged clay tiles, logs, and boulders to create spaces for overwintering guests. Entrances and exits to the chamber were established, and drainage was provided before the entire chamber was backfilled. Lastly, the entrances were covered with scrap boards to attract snakes and to help monitor activity at the site. It is anticipated that these den sites may be used by eastern milksnake, eastern gartersnake, Dekay's brownsnake, northern watersnake, and northern red-bellied snake, all of which are known to inhabit these areas. Other possibilities include gray ratsnake, northern ring-necked snake, amphibians, and small mammals. With any luck, these safe and cozy den sites will help these beneficial creatures grow their populations and contribute to a more-diverse and balanced ecosystem.



Watch the latest episode of the *Wild Medina* TV show and get to know long-time volunteer George Parmelee. You'll also learn about bobolinks, streams, a mysterious creature feature, and more. You'll have fun, too – our naturalist staff will make you chuckle with clever and silly puns!