

Allergies and Pollens

The pollens most people are allergic to are produced by plain-looking plants that do not have showy flowers because these type of plants rely on bees and birds to carry their pollen. The pollens that cause allergy problems are carried through the air. It could be said that the more you see of a plant or its pollen, the less sensitive you probably are to it. Just outside of Atlanta, Georgia, in spring, virtually everything will be coated with a layer of yellow pine tree pollen. Many people think that this is the cause of their misery since they see it everywhere. But very few people are actually allergic to pine pollen – it just happens to be the most visible. The fact that we can see it everywhere tells us that it is a heavy particle that settles quickly out of the air making it rather tough to breathe in. Hundreds of other pollen allergens that we can't see are also in the air.

The main allergy culprits in the early spring are other tree pollens like hickory, elm and oak. Late spring and early summer is when weeds such as ragweed, sagebrush, redroot, pigweed and Russian thistle (tumbleweed) produce their pollen. A single ragweed plant can generate a million grains of pollen a day, but unlike pine tree pollen, you may never see a single one. Unfortunately, your body will know they are there. Ragweed is one of the major culprits for sneezing and runny noses in North America. In the late summer and early fall, grasses including Kentucky bluegrass, timothy grass, Bermuda grass and redtop grass are the main pollen offenders. Most people who are allergic to pollen are usually sensitive to several different types.

Pollen Counts

You've probably heard your local news station give you information about pollen counts in your area. A pollen count represents the concentration of all the pollen (or a particular type if noted) in the air in a certain area at a specific time. The measurement is expressed in grains of pollen per square meter of air collected over 24 hrs. The National Allergy Bureau and *Pollen.com* offer pollen counts, which may be available for your area.

Peak times for pollen vary by region of the country. The further north you are, the later your area's pollinating period and allergy season will begin.