

BWSR Featured Plant

Name: Zigzag goldenrod (*Solidago flexicaulis*)

Plant family: Aster (Asteraceae)

Right: A clump of zigzag goldenrod grows in a native garden.



Photo Credit: Bonnie Harper-Lore

Below: Sharply serrated leaves help to identify the species.

Photo Credit: Dan Shaw, BWSR



One of 18 goldenrods (genus *Solidago*) in Minnesota, zigzag goldenrod is a common wildflower in Eastern deciduous forests.

The species isn't as aggressive as many sun-loving goldenrods, making it a good addition to rain gardens and native plantings in partial shade.

Goldenrods in general are accused of causing allergies. However, allergic reactions at the time of the goldenrod bloom are actually caused by inconspicuous bloomers such as common ragweed and grasses.

Plant Stats

STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR STATUS: FACU

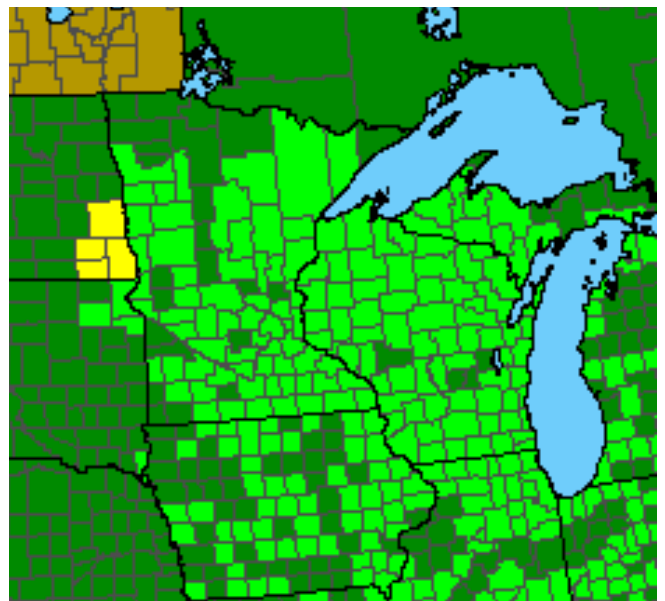
PRIMARY USES: Pollinator habitat, slope stabilization, restoration

Identification

Zigzag goldenrod is a 2- to 3-foot-tall rhizomatous perennial. Stems are erect with a slight zigzag appearance between alternate leaves. Leaves are sharp-toothed. Yellow flowers appear at the base of upper leaves in stalked clusters. The plant can form colonies via rhizomes. It self-seeds via the dry seeds' tuft of light brown hair blowing in the wind.

Range

Found in deciduous forest edges, the species occurs in eastern North America — from New Brunswick to North Dakota and south to Georgia and Arkansas. It grows naturally in most Minnesota counties except for some in the far north. It is frequently associated with red oak, basswood, green ash, black cherry, Pagoda dogwood, red-berried elderberry, gooseberry, columbine, Jack-in-the-pulpit, wild geranium, black snakeroot, hepatica, early meadow rue, sweet cicely, ferns and sedges.



In Minnesota, zigzag goldenrod grows in all but a few counties in the far north. **Map Source:** BONAP.org

Uses

Zigzag goldenrods' composite flowers attract a wide range of pollinators.

Photo Credit:
Bonnie Harper-Lore



Because zigzag goldenrod blooms from July to September, many bees, butterflies, flies and wasps are known to visit this showy plant. Its predictable late summer and early fall sunniness add seasonal interest and beauty to a garden. It is well-suited for rain gardens, biofiltration plantings, native gardens, slope stabilizations and deciduous forest restorations. The plant is known to tolerate deer browsing, heavy shade and clay soils.

Planting Recommendations

Zigzag goldenrod does well in a shade or dappled shade garden, and likes to spread. It tolerates medium to dry well-drained soils. It is easy to start from seed, and can self-seed. It is important that seeds are planted at the surface. They benefit from a light covering of leaves or straw. The species is also available in pots from native plant nurseries. It can be spread by separating clumps in early spring. It is a low-maintenance perennial native plant.

Similar Species

Broad, coarse leaves, spike-like flower clusters and growth in partial shade help distinguish this species from other goldenrods. Showy goldenrod (*Solidago speciosa*) and gray goldenrod (*Solidago nemoralis*) also have spike-like seed clusters. But they lack the sharply serrated leaves, and tend to grow in dry, sunny habitats.



Left: A gray goldenrod plant grows on sandy soil. **Photo Credit:** Peter M. Dziuk, Minnesota Wildflowers

Center and Right: The flowers and stem of showy goldenrod illustrate some of the differences among species. **Photo Credits:** Dan Shaw, BWSR

References

Missouri Botanical Garden: www.missouribotanicalgarden.org

Minnesota Wildflowers: www.minnesotawildflowers.info

Pollinators of Native Plants: Attract, Observe and Identify Pollinators and Beneficial Insects With Native Plants

The Biota of North America Program (BONAP)

Northland Wild Flowers, A Guide for the Minnesota Region

Plants of the Chicago Region

Developed by Bonnie Harper-Lore