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# BWSR FEATURED PLANT

## SHOWY GOLDENROD *Solidago speciosa*

Wetland Indicator Status:  
Upland

Family: Aster



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With bright yellow flowers in upright spikes, showy goldenrod stands out amongst brownish and bronze colored native grasses of dry prairies, roadsides and old fields in early fall. The flowers that last into late October in some years provide important late season nectar sources for a wide variety of insects that in turn provide important food sources for migratory birds. Growing in clumps and providing vibrant fall color, showy goldenrod is also a favorite native wildflower for perennial gardens, rain gardens, biofiltration areas and lakeshores.



Bright yellow inflorescence of showy goldenrod with native pollinators

### Identification

There are around fifteen species of goldenrod in Minnesota with a wide variety of habitat requirements and growth forms, though nearly all of them have yellow flowers(except *S. ptarmicoides* with white flowers) that bloom in

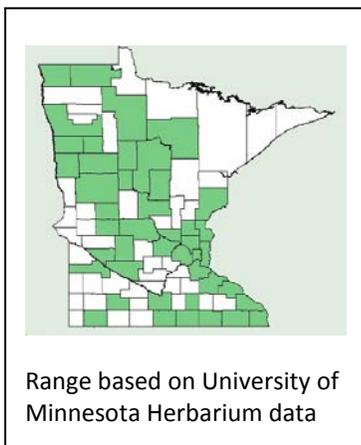
late summer or fall. Showy goldenrod is unique due to its upright growth form, and dense flower spike. The species has multiple green to reddish stems and grows up to 60-inches in height. Its leaves are lance shaped and usually are without teeth, they are also somewhat “winged” where they taper to meet the stem. The leaves decrease in size further up the stem. The flowers are in a spike-like panicles and individual flowers have both ray and disk flowers like other species in the aster family. The achenes develop tufts of hair that allow the seeds to be dispersed by wind.

Small leaves are found in the leaf axils on the upper portion of the stem



### Range

This species is found across most of Minnesota with the exception of far northeast Minnesota. It prefers full to partial sun and moist to dry soil conditions, making it well adapted to a variety of habitats including dry prairie, mesic prairie, oak savanna, old fields, railroad right-of-ways, and roadsides. It is most common in areas with sandy soil or on dry bluff prairies. The species is found in the eastern two thirds of the United States with the exception of Maine, Alabama and Florida.



Clump of showy goldenrod with leaves decreasing in size further up the stem

## Uses

Solido is Latin for “to heal” referring to the wide range of ailments that goldenrod species were used to treat. These include using a decoction from pulverized roots to treat lung ailments and also using the plant to treat fevers, colds, burns, difficult childbirth, ulcers and boils. The roots and stems were boiled to make a warm poultice to be applied to sore muscles and sprains (Densmore 2005).

### Primary Uses:

- Pollinator Habitat
- Bank Stabilization
- Medicine
- Water Filtration



Clump of showy goldenrod established from seed in a dry prairie

Showy goldenrod is included in a wide range of conservation plantings including prairie restorations, pollinator plantings, lakeshores, raingardens, biofiltration areas, septic fields, landfill caps, and mine reclamation. The species has both deep fibrous roots and rhizomatous roots, making it effective at stabilizing slopes. A wide range of insects use the plant, primarily for nectar including honeybees, bumblebees, ants, beetles, moth and butterflies. Other insects feed on leaves and stems of the plant including moth caterpillars, leafhoppers, lace bugs, plant bugs and beetles (Illinois Wildflowers 2013). Birds visit showy goldenrod to eat insects but many species such as sparrows and goldfinches also eat the seeds.

## Planting Recommendations

Sneezeweed is commonly planted from both seed and plants. The species has small seeds that need to be planted near the surface. The seed is most often broadcasted onto a loosened seedbed. Rolling may be beneficial if the soil is hard packed to aid seed-to-soil contact and prevent seed from blowing away. The seed does not always require stratification. However, dry stratification, where the seed is subjected to freezing (or colder) temperatures for a month or longer to break dormancy may increase germination. It is common to seed the species in late fall to allow for natural stratification to occur. This is a common practice when seeding pollinator plantings to ensure good establishment of forbs.

### Planting Methods:

- Broadcast seeding
- Containers
- Transplanting

Showy goldenrod tends to be available in a variety of container sizes from plugs to one-gallon containers for raingarden and lakeshore plantings. Plugs are sufficient for most projects if the planting will be sufficiently cared for with weeding and watering. Plugs can often nearly reach maturity the first season and tend to bloom the second season of establishment. Showy goldenrod is relatively drought tolerant and is typically planted in dry soils, but will need supplemental water periodically to promote growth of young plants. Mature plants grow in clumps that can be separated into many individual transplants. Transplants should not be taken from native stands to protect remnant populations. Transplanting is most commonly conducted in late fall before the soil freezes or shortly after the frost comes out of the ground in the spring. It can be conducted other times of the year but this timing will ensure good soil moisture. The species can grow excessively tall and tip over in garden plantings when there is little competition and moist soils, so it is best to plant it on slopes or in relatively sandy soil.

Clumps of showy goldenrod can be separated into many individual transplants

## Additional References

Illinois Wildflowers: [http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/prairie/plantx/shw\\_goldenrod.htm](http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/prairie/plantx/shw_goldenrod.htm)  
UW-Steven’s Point Freckman Herbarium

<http://wisplants.uwsp.edu/scripts/SearchResults.asp?Genus=Solidago&Species=speciosa>

Minnesota Wildflowers <http://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/flower/showy-goldenrod>

Strength of the Earth, The Classic Guide to Ojibwe Uses of Native Plants, Frances Densmore, 2005