

# Golden rain tree, goldenrod reliable fall color

*Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office*

Several of my gardening friends have commented on landscape plants that earned my 2011 Energizer Bunny Performance Award. My award nominations were given to exceptional plants I saw while traveling in the county. Just like that pink bunny rabbit in TV commercials, some plants proved they can take a licking yet keep on ticking.

Exceptional weather conditions tend to showcase landscape plants that can withstand harsh weather conditions and deliver exceptional performance. Hurricane Ike provided a list of award winners about three years ago, and the record drought and heat wave of 2011 has provided other winners.

Since it's near mid-November, I thought I would be finished with dispensing my 2011 Energizer Bunny Performance Awards. Not so as I'm still traveling around the county.

This week's column is focused on two very dissimilar plants whose only similarity is their well-deserved common names. The first plant is known as the golden rain tree and the second plant is a weed (yes, a weed) commonly known as goldenrod.

## Golden rain tree

During this time of year, I invariably get asked about the identity of a landscape tree growing in Dickinson about



PHOTO BY Dr. William M. Johnson

one-half mile west of the Gulf Freeway along FM 517.

The tree is known as the golden rain tree (*Koelreuteria bipinnata*). This tree has a rounded crown and lacy leaves that provide soft texture. As fall temperatures cool, the leaves will turn yellow before falling.

Without a doubt, the golden rain tree is perhaps most striking in the fall when clusters of showy, three-sided seed pods are produced in abundance near the tips of branches. Trees appear to be covered with Chinese paper lanterns.

These large clusters are botanically known as panicles and can be up to 18 inches long and 12 inches wide. Imagine eye-catching and massive displays of 18-inch-by-12-inch clusters of golden seed pods "appearing" on a

tree and you will understand why I get this question during this time of year.

The golden rain tree is reported to be tolerant of drought, heat, wind and alkaline soil. We certainly had the first three weather factors in abundance during the 2011 growing season and the majority of local soils tend to be slightly alkaline.

## Goldenrod

Why place a weed on the award list? While goldenrod is considered a weed, it provides one of the last showy and massive flower displays of the fall season.

Goldenrod is a 6- to 8-foot plant with showy yellow blooms and can be seen along our bayous, railroad tracks, in pastures and along highways. Given our record-setting



November 09, 2011



Dr. William Johnson is a horticulturist with the Galveston County Office of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Visit his website at <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston>.

*News column printed in the Galveston Daily News, The Post, and other Galveston County Newspapers.*





drought, any mass display of color is appreciated by the visual senses.

I am often asked by gardeners who suffer from allergies if goldenrod is a primary culprit for allergy problems. The answer is no. Seventy-five percent of allergy sufferers are allergic to the pollen of another weed commonly known as ragweed.

It's unfortunate goldenrod and ragweed commonly are seen sharing the same patch of ground to grow in. Unfortunately, goldenrod, with its large clusters of flower heads, is often blamed for allergy problems actually are caused by ragweed, which produce clusters of inconspicuous flowers capable of releasing massive amounts of airborne pollen.

Allergies seem especially bad this year, and some allergy sufferers still are sneezing, sniffing and dealing with headaches. The first fall frost will help rid the air of the ragweed pollen so we can enjoy the outdoors without exposing ourselves to the ragweed pollen and, instead, spend a little time enjoying the goldenrod before it quits blooming. Be patient, it will take a freeze to kill the ragweed plants.

Goldenrod is easy to find as it grows very well in this area. Fortunately, they are also a great benefit to this area. Goldenrod serves as an excellent source of nectar for a variety of beneficial insects.

Goldenrod is more abundant than any other wildflower at this time of year. There are dozens of species of goldenrods; however, Canada goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis*), is the more common and taller species found in Galveston County.

