

Western Ragweed

(*Ambrosia psilostachya*)

Western Ragweed is yet another common name of a plant that is, simply, misleading. Western Ragweed can be found throughout most of North America, with the exception of Alaska, the northern tier of Canadian provinces, and the mid-east states of Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia (source: USDA Plants Database). The Latin name is also interesting – Ambrosia is derived from the Greek word meaning “food of the gods” (hardly agreeable to those suffering from Ragweed allergy!) and psilostachya which derives from the Greek words “bare” and “spike”, alluding to the flower spike.

Western Ragweed is a perennial plant, which means it does not die over winter. It is also unique amongst the Ragweeds in that it can spread through a vigorous root system. Like other Ragweeds, Western Ragweed can be found in disturbed areas, along roadsides and in abandoned fields. It can grow up to five feet tall, but usually will be seen at less than three feet. Western Ragweed can grow in dense colonies, mainly due to its ability to exude chemicals from its roots that inhibit other seeds ability to germinate.

False Ragweed pollen easily becomes airborne, and is considered a severe allergen. All pollens of the various Ragweeds cross-react to great degree. Like the other Ragweeds, Western Ragweed flowers from mid-summer to late fall. All Ragweed pollen can cause allergic rhinitis (inflammation of the nose/sinus), allergic conjunctivitis (allergic inflammation of the eyes) and asthma.

