



Goldenrod (Solidago)

FRIEND OR FOE

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Friend or foe? It depends. The goldenrod species, location, management and perspective all play into the friend or foe discussion.

There are more than 100 species of goldenrod (*Solidago*) with a dozen used commonly in restoration plantings like CRP. Canada goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis*) is the poster child for “down with goldenrod” discussions, but stiff goldenrod (*S. rigida*) and even Missouri goldenrod (*S. missouriensis*) can garner similar disdain. Their colonization success is the reason these species are sometimes hated. Seeds establish quickly in bare soil and are strong competitors, even with robust native grasses. In addition to seeds, goldenrods spread via rhizomes. The end result is often large patches of goldenrod with little else below. That said, there are a number of goldenrod species that are less aggressive and important parts of a native restoration (Grey / old field, zig-sag, showy, grass-leaved).



Where you are also is an important consideration. Generally, the further east you travel, the more “weedy” goldenrod becomes. In the West, Canada goldenrod is a desired species and the east it lands on some state weed lists.

Management regime can also contribute or reduce goldenrod. In many states, spring burning of wildlife areas is a well-established routine. Burning at the same time ultimately favors some species and sets back others. Spring burns are great for native warm season grasses and late blooming species like goldenrod. Growing season burns (summer-fall), can help set back goldenrod or keep it in control.

Ultimately, it comes down to perspective. Goldenrod is a terrific pollinator species. In fact, it is a vital fall-blooming species that supplies the nectar for Monarchs on their long migration across the United States into Mexico. The stiff-stemmed forb also provides important structure in a native planting and helps CRP stand up against heavy winter snows.

Finally, to dispel a myth. Goldenrod is not to blame for your seasonal allergies. The prolific, showy yellow flowers are often blamed for seasonal allergies, but the real culprit is usually ragweed. The pollen of goldenrod species is too heavy to fall far from the plant.

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GOLDENROD CONTROL – where it becomes foe

Timing:

The showy yellow flowers are an easy giveaway of goldenrod. Control treatments can certainly occur throughout the year, early fall treatments provide easy identification of the treatment area. Also, many of the desirable species that bloom early have gone dormant so there is less risk to those plants.

Mechanical Control (aka mowing):

One easy technique to control those large dense colonies of goldenrod is carefully timed mowing. Mow shortly after blooming (August / Early September). This prevents seed production and depletes rhizome reserves. Another mechanical control method would be digging or hand pulling for those who can identify the problem goldenrod species and enjoy a work-out.

Chemical Control:

There are a couple of effective herbicides and application methods that can be used to set back dense colonies of goldenrod.

1. Spraying glyphosate (ie Roundup) – this method is recommended primarily on large dense colonies where there are no other desirable species growing. Understand that anything actively growing that gets sprayed will die. With this type of broad-spectrum application, you will need to re-seed the treated area.
2. Leaf spritz – this method works very well for small to medium sized colonies where other desirable species are in close proximity. Mix a 20% mixture of triclopyr (Garlon 4) in bark oil in a hand-held spray bottle. Give a few leaves on the upper part of each stem in the clone a quick spritz. If you successfully spray each stem, you should have 100% control of the clone.
3. Dabbing / Painting – this method works well for small to medium sized colonies where other desirable species are in close proximity.
 - a. Cut stems in target goldenrod colony at waist height using a hand-held hedge trimmer
 - b. Mix a 20% glyphosate (Round up) solution in water. Using a non-sponge type trim applicator (brush)
 - c. Dab the tip of each stem with the herbicide solution. Tip: use a container tall enough to hold your brush upright.

Growing Season Burn:

Growing season burns are gaining popularity among habitat managers. In addition to offering better control of some invasive species, rotating burning between early-spring, late-spring and growing season (late-summer or early fall) generally promote diversity in your stand by setting back some species and promoting growth of others.

Prescribed burns can be dangerous and should only be conducted by properly trained personnel.

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