



## YOU CAN CONTROL POLLEN ALLERGIES

If you have **seasonal pollen allergies**, it's time to take charge and be in control of your allergen or allergy trigger. In Texas **heavy pollen of one variety or another is prevalent January through November**. **Tree Pollens** about January through June. **Grass Pollen** season overlaps from April to September. **Weed Pollen** season is July to November – just in time for the **Ragweed** season which lasts from August into November or our first heavy frost. And these pollen seasons can be prolonged depending on rainfall and temperatures.

**Pollens are** miniscule, lightweight, dry powdery granules generated by flowering trees, grasses and plants. Plants, like most life forms, are usually either masculine or feminine. Male pollens are **necessary for fertilization**. Some pollen is **spread from male to female plants via the wind, others by butterflies or bees**. Trees are the earliest seasonal pollen-producers and many trees remain active in Texas into November. **Tree pollen** is so light that winds can carry these pollens many miles from their source. Of the more than 50,000 types of trees, less than 100 types contribute pollen – and most of these are native to Texas.

**Pollen Counts** measure the amount of these granules in the air. The pollens that cause our **seasonal allergies** are usually those spread via **winds**; we **inhale them, resulting in rhinitis** or runny nose. **Symptoms for seasonal rhinitis, also called Hay Fever**, include sneezing, congestion, runny nose, itchiness in the nose, the roof of the mouth or throat, eyes and ears. Allergies can lead to other serious diseases and shouldn't be ignored. You can take charge of your seasonal allergies by reducing your exposure to the pollens that affect you.

**Combat Seasonal Pollen Allergies:** **1)** Plan your garden to be allergy-friendly by minimizing your exposure to pollens. Plants with bright, large flowers are usually pollinated by bees or butterflies not by winds. Some **allergy-friendly plants** include alyssum, phlox, dusty miller, lavender, geraniums, lilies, roses, hosta, snapdragons, pansies, begonias, daisy, impatiens, petunias, verbena, iris, salvia and hibiscus - good choices for lots of color but low wind-borne pollen. Like flowers, trees have a gender: it's the **male trees that produce the most pollen**. Female ash, box elder, cottonwood, date palm, red maple, silver maple, poplar and willow trees are **completely pollen-free, the most allergy-friendly trees**. If you're planting trees, add those pollen-free varieties or others that are **fairly allergen-free** including crepe myrtle, dogwood, fig, fir, palm, pear, plum, rosebud or redwood. Male trees that produce heavy wind-borne pollen include alder, cottonwood, ash, cypress, palm, elm, pecan, beech, hickory, poplar, birch, juniper, sycamore, yellow elder, mountain cedar, mulberry, walnut, cedar, oak and willow trees. If you must plant one of those, seek a female plant. Ask your gardener how to determine gender in plants; because they are hardier, there are more male varieties available. **Avoid planting any wildflowers or astilbe and pampas grass**, all heavy wind pollinators. **Grass pollen** is a major contributor to hay fever. The worst grass pollen varieties are Bermuda, Johnson grass, Kentucky Bluegrass, Orchard grass, Sweet vernal grass and Timothy grass – all prevalent in Texas. It helps to keep your grass mowed short and if possible, replace the offending grass with ground covers like Irish moss, bunch, dichondra or stones or pebbles. Who said we need grass? **2)** Try to avoid outdoor activities like gardening or mowing if you have pollen allergies, but if you want to or must do it, wear a mask, gloves and special eye wear; a smear of Vaseline under the nose traps pollens, too. Charge your clothes in the garage and put the work clothes into a hot wash immediately, then shower and wash your hair when you come inside to eliminate any pollens clinging to your hair or body. Rinsing your nose with warm water also helps to wash away pollens before they're inhaled. Ask your doctor about using antihistamines before outside activities. **3)** Pollen levels are highest early mornings and late afternoon; avoid going outdoors at these times, especially on windy spring days **4)** Set your vehicle AC to recirculate and keep your windows rolled up. **5)** Since **rain temporarily washes pollen from the air**, a good time to be outdoors walking, jogging or running is right after a rainfall. **6)** Check pollen counts before any strenuous physical activity outdoors. One site is <http://www.pollen.com/allergy-weather-forecast.asp>? **6)** Plan a vacation when your allergens are at peak but look for a destination where your pollen allergens are low at that time. **7)** Its **easier to keep pollen out than get it out** – keep your house windows closed and use AC instead during peak pollen times. **8)** Don't dry clothes outside where it can collect pollens – use a dryer instead or drying racks indoors. **9)** Dogs and cats collect pollen on their coats and bring it into your home. Don't forget to shampoo your pets frequently which will help stop them from being pollen carriers. **10)** Ask your physician if Immunotherapy or allergy shots are right for your seasonal airborne allergies. **You can take charge** – you can be in control of your allergies.