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#### **Air It Out – Electronic Version. Vol. 17, Issue 4, #1 April 2010**

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### **ARE POLLENS CRIMPING YOUR STYLE?**

\* Just when we think we've survived the winter Mountain Cedar onslaught, spring warmth and wind are stirring up new pollens and causing many to think twice about venturing outdoors. **Pollen allergies resulting in** asthma symptoms, or runny nose, red and burning eyes, sneezing, congestion and a raspy voice are a major **cause for seasonal rhinitis** and pollen counts are highest and travel farthest on warm, dry, breezy days, the kind of days we experience in March, April and May. Tree, grass, weed, wildflower pollen and mold are all at their peak at this time and cause many to hunt for Kleenex and head indoors. But for those who live in Texas, it's not only spring pollens that plague allergy. **Tree Pollens** abound January through June, **grass pollen** season overlaps from April to September and **weed pollen** season is July to November, just in time for the **ragweed** season which goes from August into November or our first heavy frost.

\* **Pollens are** miniscule, lightweight, dry powdery granules generated by flowering trees, grasses and plants. Plants, like most life forms, are either masculine or feminine. Male pollens are **necessary for fertilization** to spread plant growth. 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 their pollens hundreds of 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. In general, they are higher in early morning before 10 a.m. and in late afternoon and evening but lower after a rain storm. They are very high when the winds are strong on sunny, clear days. If you have pollen allergy, often called Hay Fever, you don't have to hide indoors. All you need do is make some wise decisions. **Decide to do something** about your seasonal rhinitis for the long run. Immunology shots, otherwise known as allergy shots, have a high success rate for pollen allergy. Make an appointment with your allergist to be tested and begin treatment. **Decide to do something** in the short run: avoid your pollen allergens. Numerous sites list daily pollen counts. Check them each morning. When high, plan for indoor activity, keep windows shut and the AC running (window screens won't keep pollens out). Instead, air out the house on days when winds are calm. Avoid barbecues, walks, jogs or other activities on very windy days or before a predicted thunderstorm as pollen counts are higher then.

\* You don't have to give up gardening or having a nicely landscaped yard, you just have to be smart about your choices. **Plan** gardening **activities** for the times when you are **least affected with allergy symptoms**, either mid- morning or early evening on calm, sunless days or perhaps after some rain. **When gardening**, wear a *mask* to block pollens. A bit of *Vaseline or Vicks underneath your nostrils* will help trap pollens before you can inhale them, too, as will *rinsing your nostrils with some water after your chores* are done. **Avoid** touching your face or eyes while gardening. Wearing *gloves* not only protects your skin but also reminds you not to touch your face or eyes. As silly as you may feel, wear goggles and a face mask while mowing to avoid pollen and molds. Ask your healthcare provider if you should use a non-drowsy antihistamine before extended garden chores. **Pollen clings to clothes and skin** so after gardening, strip down in the garage or laundry room and throw your clothes into the washer immediately (wash gardening clothes separately: the pollens will transfer to other clothes otherwise) and head for the **shower to shampoo**. If you wear glasses, either sun or view, don't forget to rinse those off too and rinse your nostrils clean of clinging pollens.

\* **Planting the right shrubs, flowers and plants** in your garden will help **reduce your pollen exposure**, too. **Male plants and trees produce the most pollen** and unfortunately, since male plants also produce less berries and twigs, they have become best sellers in nurseries. Ask your garden store which plants and trees are **female** and choose those for planting. The **worst trees or shrubs to plant** are alder, cottonwood, ash, cypress, palm, elm, pecan, beech, hickory, poplar, birch, juniper, sycamore, yellow elder, mulberry, walnut, cedar, oak and willow: these are pollinated by wind.

\* Bright colored **flowers and plants** with strong scent are usually a good bet to plant because their pollens are too dense and heavy to be carried by the wind. Their pollinators are birds, bees, moths and butterflies. Avoid planting wildflowers, astilbe, pampas grass, coneflower, crocus, elderberry, juniper, peony and privet shrubs.

\* Wage a campaign against **flowering weeds** which are heavy **wind pollinators**. The **worst grass pollen** varieties are Bermuda, Johnson grass, Kentucky bluegrass, Orchard grass, Sweet vernal grass and Timothy grass – all prevalent in Texas and all really weeds. It helps to keep your grass mowed short and watered to hold dust down and if possible, replace the offending grass with St. Augustine, fescue, or ground covers like Irish moss, bunch, dichondra or even stone or gravel. Think about it. We spend many dollars and so much time planting, fertilizing and watering grass only to cut it down every two weeks. Do we really need grass? For more information, email [info@aafatexas.org](mailto:info@aafatexas.org)

**Upcoming AAFA-TX programs:** **2) April 9** "Asthma Management & Education" a continuing education program for nurses, respiratory therapists and educators worth 3 CEU. Chicago, IL. Don Cui, PA-C, AE-C, instructor **3) May 12** "Tools To Manage Your Asthma & Allergies" Citi Group, Irving, TX, Andrew D. Beaty, MD, instructor **4) May 15** "Manage Adolescent and Adult Asthma with a Team Approach: Apply NHLBI Guideline to Your Practice" a CME symposium worth 4.5 category 1 credits (4.5 AOA category 1-B credits and 4.5 ACPE contact hours) for physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, pharmacists, nurses and respiratory therapists. Arlington, TX. To register see <http://aafatexas.org/registration.htm> **5) June 14** "Asthma Management & Education" a continuing education program for nurses, respiratory therapists and educators worth 3 CEU. Dallas. Pre-registration required with Dallas ISD. Questions? Visit [www.aafatexas.org](http://www.aafatexas.org) for complete symposium details or contact [info@aafatexas.org](mailto:info@aafatexas.org)

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