
Wildflower Spot – April 2015
John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

GOLDEN RAGWORT

Packera aurea

By Helen Hamilton, *Past-president of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*

Golden Ragwort is a welcome sign of spring, covering swampy areas with bright yellow, from mid-March through early summer. The buds are purple, and open to display yellow disc and ray flowers, unusual for a member of the Aster Family -- the rays are often white. This native perennial grows 1-3 feet tall, with only a few deeply-cut leaves on the stems. The leaves at the base of the plant are heart-shaped, in a large rosette. After the flowers fade, these leaves spread to form a nice groundcover which will persist over most of the winter.

Growing naturally in bogs, wet woods, flood-plains and meadows in eastern North America, Golden Ragwort thrives in acid, rich soil, zones 3 to 9. The plant can be aggressive, and will grow under trees where nothing else thrives. Propagation is by seed and division.

Golden Ragwort is one of the herbs (ground and dissolved in alcohol) that are sold as Lydia Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, widely marketed as a cure for any "female complaint." A tea made from the root and leaves was used by American Indians, settlers and herbalists to treat delayed and irregular menses, leucorrhea and childbirth complications, leading to its alternate common name "squaw-weed."



"Ragwort" means a plant with ragged leaves, and "wort" is an Old English word for "plant".

Blooming in the spring, the flowers are an important source of nectar for early insects and butterflies. ❖

Photo: Golden Ragwort (*Packera aurea*) taken by Helen Hamilton
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.