

Go Native!

Gardening with native plants on Lake George

BY EMILY DEBOLT

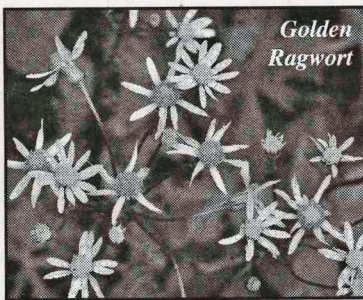
Plant of the Month Golden Ragwort *Packera aurea*

(formerly called *Senecio aureus*)

Don't let its less than lovely sounding common name fool you. Also called Golden groundsel or Butterweed, the bright golden yellow flowers of Golden ragwort are a great addition to any garden. Golden ragwort is in the aster family, and is our earliest blooming native aster, blooming mid to late spring (May to June around here). It can grow in sun to shade, so it provides a great pop of color in the shade garden after many of the spring ephemerals are petering out but before some of the other shade tolerant asters bloom.

The golden flowers are around an inch in size, with a cluster of them blooming atop an erect stalk that grows 1-2 ft high out of the cluster of basal leaves. Showy, daisy-like, and bright golden yellow, they are very pretty. If planted en masse, it can create a 'golden glow' in the garden.

The basal leaves are large, dark green, and glossy. They are heart-shaped and create a nice ground cover long after the flower is gone.



Once it is done blooming, just clip the stalks off for a neater appearance. But be sure to wait for the seeds to spread first if you want more of a groundcover effect. If you don't, clip the flowers off as soon as they are done flowering, but before the seeds drop.

Hardy in zones 3-9, Golden ragwort is found across much of the eastern United States in meadows, wet woods, and swamps. It prefers moist soils, and seeds freely in the garden if the soil is moist. However, it can also grow in drier areas, including regular gardens soils. It just won't seed and spread as much. Besides seed, it also spreads by runners underground. So relatively quickly, Golden ragwort can create a great ground cover in the garden.

Golden ragwort also has a number of medicinal uses. The roots and leaves are used in tea by the Cherokee Indians for heart trouble and to prevent pregnancy. Other Native Americans also used it for a variety of uses, from aiding in childbirth to helping treat lung diseases, and in external ointments for treating ulcers and wounds. The

leaves contain a low toxicity alkaloid (Pyrrolizidine) which keeps most mammals away from eating the foliage (however apparently sheep will still eat it!). So it is a good plant for your garden if you have deer problems. You can divide it in the spring; however, if you have sensitive skin, wear gloves and long sleeves, otherwise you might get some skin irritation from touching the leaves.

The basal leaves of Golden ragwort can look similar to that of an invasive species we have in this area, garlic mustard. If you think you have Garlic mustard in your garden, you want to pull it, but just be sure you are pulling the right plant if you also have Golden ragwort! The leaves of Garlic mustard do smell like garlic, so that is an easy way to check. If you have an infestation of Garlic mustard on your property that you have been pulling, Golden ragwort is a great plant to use to try to reclaim the site. The basal leaves are evergreen, so it seems to compete well with Garlic mustard. But again, their similar appearance can make managing the garden tricky! So you have to pay attention when you are weeding in the Spring.

"Go Native" highlights a different native plant each month that can be used in the home garden and landscape. Written by Emily DeBolt, owner of Fiddlehead Creek Farm and Native Plant Nursery in Hartford, NY. For more info about gardening with native plants, Emily can be reached at Emily@fiddleheadcreek.com.