

Wildflower in Focus

Text by Melanie Choukas-Bradley
Artwork by Tina Thieme Brown

Silverrod

Solidago bicolor L.

Aster or Daisy Family (*Asteraceae*)



Solidago bicolor

Silver-rod

Tina Thieme Brown ©2008

Goldenrods are graceful flowering plants of late summer and fall that are often falsely accused of causing the allergies that stem from ragweed pollen. Botanists have another, more legitimate, bone to pick with goldenrods. They are notoriously difficult to identify. However, one species in Maryland's flora has flower parts that are white, rather than yellow, giving the flower heads an overall "silvery" appearance, and giving rise to the poetic name: "silverrod." Silverrod and its golden brethren are members of the highly evolved aster or daisy family. What you think you see is deceptive. Examine a silverrod (or goldenrod) flower cluster up close and you will find many individual flower heads that look like single flowers with "petals" and golden centers. Look more closely, preferably with a hand lens, and you will find tiny perfect 5-parted disk flowers at the center of the "blossom" and individual pistillate ray flowers surrounding them like petals.

Flower Heads: Small rays are creamy white, 7 - 9 per flower head; tiny disks are yellow. Each flower head 1/4 - 1/3" long. Flower heads in upright terminal clusters and springing from the uppermost leaf axils. The clusters are not one-sided and curved, as are many members of the *Solidago* genus.

Leaves: Alternate, simple. Upper leaves lanceolate or elliptic; lower leaves oblanceolate or obovate. Upper leaves untoothed, sessile; lower leaves toothed and often tapered to a petiole. Uppermost leaves may be less than an inch long; lower ones up to several inches.

Height and Growth Habit: 6 - 30"; usually upright; single-stalked or branched.

Habitat and Range: Dry woods, rocky outcrops, roadsides; Nova Scotia and Quebec to Wisconsin; south to Georgia and Louisiana.

Similar Species: Other goldenrods (*Solidago* and *Euthamia* species) have yellow rays, but note that silverrod disks are yellow and the white rays may wither early. Hairy goldenrod (*S. hispida*) is very similar to silverrod, but has yellow ray flowers.

Blooming Time: Late summer - fall.

Locations: C & O Canal, Sugarloaf Mountain, throughout Maryland.

"Wildflower in Focus" is adapted from **An Illustrated Guide to Eastern Woodland Wildflowers and Trees: 350 Plants Observed at Sugarloaf Mountain, Maryland** (Choukas-Bradley and Brown, University of Virginia Press).