# VNPS Piedmont Chapter
# WILDFLOWER of the WEEK

## WILDFLOWER #75 answer: SILVERROD (*Solidago bicolor*)

In a genus of up to 120 goldenrods, this is the one plant you can count on knowing. Silverrod stands out for its white or cream-colored ray flowers, unlike any other goldenrod in the eastern United States. Of course, the disk flowers are yellowish, and so are the stamens and pollen, so the effect is two-toned or bi-colored. The flowers nestle in the axils of leaves rather than in panicles at the ends of stems. The leaves get smaller going up the densely hairy, grayish stalk.

Long a folk remedy, goldenrods take their genus name from Latin *soldare*, "to make whole" (as in solid or solder). They are not the culprits in hay fever—look to ragweed pollen for that. Their sap and fruit does contain solanine, the same poison that gives its name to the unrelated nightshade family. Thanks to this chemical, they are resistant to deer and rabbits and probably other mammals.

Silverrod can grow in partial shade, so you will often see it along trails in the woods or on roadsides. It puts up with salt, clay, rocks, and sand, almost anything, so you might see it shining in dry places that discourage other plants.

Silverrod attracts a lot of action. Songbirds eat the seeds, butterflies and cuckoo beetles suck the nectar, and many kinds of short- and long-tongued bees come for pollen. It is the host plant for larvae of the Goldenrod leaf miner moth, which slings a "hammock" between the upper and lower surfaces of a leaf, and for the Wavy-lined emerald moth. Most surprising are gall-forming midges in the genus *Asphondylia*, which colonize the stems. These little creatures produce three larval instars inside the gall. The third instar larva makes a small hole in the gall and crawls out. It has no legs, but it jumps anyway, curling into a circle and using hydrostatic pressure to uncurl explosively and hurl itself into the air.

## WILDFLOWER #76

***Clues:*** Tall golden plumes fill the sunny meadow.

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