



Pollen

It is a bane and curse to hay-fever sufferers without regard to their station in life. The agony plagues the victims night and day, at work and at rest, awake or asleep.

The sensation created is reminiscent of a sadistic medieval torture inflicted by leather hooded brutes. An invisible vise slowly and deliberately squeezes the heads of the ill-fated to a near eye-popping level of intensity.

It is all caused by a nearly invisible compound which occurs to excess in spring. Pollen, a sure sign spring is here, is a curse to some and a blessing to others.

Pollen is the plant produced powder containing the male half of the genes during the reproductive process. The grains have a hard coat which protects the cells during the process.

Pollen travels from the stamens to the pistil of flowering plants. In coniferous plants it moves from the male cone to the female cone. The delivery is accomplished on the wind, or by insects or animals which brush against the stamens.

The earliest historic records of pollen date back to the Devonian epoch about 400 million years ago. Pollen's rugged outer sheath provided the necessary resistance to the rigors of the fossilization.

Pollen was produced in huge quantities and left an extensive fossil record. Many of the pollen grains were separated from their parent plant creating many mysteries yet to be resolved.

Pollen found at archeological sites and lodged on ancient textiles has assisted in identifying plant and trees which existed at specific times and locations. It provided hard evidence of plants and tree throughout history.





Pollens which initiate allergies are those from plants and trees that the pollen is dispersed by air currents. Not surprisingly. These plants produce large quantities of lightweight pollen which is easily disbursed on the breezes.

Pine trees are the most likely Wakulla County culprits during early spring, but there are other contributors. Pollen grains of pines have a winged shape which improves its aerodynamic potential.

The fine airborne granules are easily inhaled. They subsequently come into contact with the sensitive respiratory passages.

As the season progresses, many other trees and plants will contribute the nasal overload. The pollen volume peaks again in the autumn with mainly weeds supplying the aggravating dust.

The insect world, primarily European Honeybees, view the springtime pollen explosion quite differently than people. They collect and store pollen for use as a future food source.

Pollen is a major protein source for honeybees. They produce 'bee bread' with the pollen which is used to carry their hives through lean times.

Worker bees collect the pollen under their wings. They return to their hive when they have a full load, then repeat the process until the pollen source is exhausted.

Some native Wakulla County spiders use pollen as a supplement to their diet of insects, including unlucky honeybees.

There are some who claim that consuming locally produced honey, which contains pollen, will alleviate many hay fever symptoms. Clinically this has not been proven.

To learn more about pollen sources in Wakulla County, contact your UF/IFAS Wakulla Extension Office at 850-926-3931 or at <http://wakulla.ifas.ufl.edu/>, and leave your comments and questions about the article.

