

Allergy Sufferers Beware... Pollen Season is Upon Us!

Once again, hasn't it been just a beautiful week? I will never, ever, complain about 80 degree temperatures in February (for 20 degree temperatures, it's a completely different story). Ah, ah, ah- choo! Well, excuse me!

Of course, the high temperatures and sunshine, and the fair amount of rainfall that we had around Christmas, have set us up for a "good" spring—but as I'm wont to say, "ya gotta take the bad with the good" (no-one has ever accused me of being an optimist). The good will be the abundant spring wildflowers and their insect pollinators but the bad—for those of us with allergies—will be the abundant spring pollen.

Most of our common trees around here, especially the cedars and pines, are wind pollinated. On windy days during the height of pollination you can see the pollen coming off of the trees in clouds. It can color the air and cover the ground, vegetation and water with a coating of yellow, creating quite a mess that hangs around far longer than the initial pollen season.

Everyone in central Texas is familiar with "cedar fever," even if

they don't suffer from it, due to the attention given to it in local media. The primary culprit is the Mountain or Ash Cedar, *Juniperus ashei*, found throughout the Hill Country. In case you hadn't noticed, we're downwind of that species and on windy days many of us suffer from the effects.

Our local "cedar," however, is the Eastern Red Cedar, *Juniperus virginiana*, not the more western Hill Country species. It's less of a problem for allergy sufferers and we're largely upwind of the vast eastern US range of this species, too. That doesn't mean that it won't affect local allergy sufferers, just that it's less of a problem.

A walk in the woods over the next month or so can leave you sneezing, rubbing your eyes or just plain miserable. Believe me, I know. At its worst, the pollen will coat the ground and become airborne again as you walk. Imagine how bad it is for critters that are a lot closer to the ground! Our two Aussies sneeze more frequently at this time of year (small wonder!).

Over the last weekend, I noticed the pollen coming off of the cedars though it's a bit early yet for



Male "cones" of an Eastern Red Cedar, *Juniperus virginiana*, ripe with pollen.

the pines. Saturday especially was one of those days when strong winds from the west brought us a nasty cocktail of west Texas dust,

cedar and other sneeze-inducing pollen. Pollen season is upon us.

Just be glad you don't live further east!