

# Common Beneficial Plants Found in Wildlife Habitat Established Through CREP and Other Farm Bill Programs



*Prepared by: Pennsylvania Game Commission  
NE Region Wildlife Diversity Biologist  
Photos provided by Kevin Wenner or as indicated in photo  
September 2007*



*This publication is available at <http://www.pgc.state.pa.us/crep>*

*This publication's development and printing was supported in part by a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) Harrisburg, PA. This work was sponsored by the Pennsylvania Association of Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Councils, Pennsylvania Game Commission, and U.S. Department of Agriculture, Farm Services Agency (USDA-FSA) Harrisburg, PA.*

*USDA and Pennsylvania Association of RC&D Councils are equal opportunity providers and employers.*



# Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
Common Ragweed.....	3
Queen Anne’s Lace.....	4
Common Milkweed .....	5
Goldenrod .....	6
Ironweeds.....	7
Smartweeds.....	8
Asters and Fleabanes.....	9
Joe-Pye Weed.....	10
Staghorn and Smooth Sumac .....	11
Hemp Dogbane .....	12
Blackberries and Raspberries.....	13
Blue Vervain .....	14
Boneset .....	15
PA Resource Conservation and Development Councils .....	16

## Introduction

The following visual guide was created for use by landowners with property enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) or other Farm Bill Conservation Programs. This publication should also be useful to any landowners managing grassland, old field and early successional habitat for wildlife. This document has been created to educate landowners on visual identification of some of the more common weeds/wildflowers that **naturally** occur in agricultural fields, meadows and old fields that offer a benefit to wildlife. These are **not** plants that have been seeded as part of your seed mix for your conservation planting. Some of the following plants may require some level of control during the establishment period of your conservation planting. The wildlife species benefiting from these plants can include birds, mammals and insects that utilize this habitat for any part of their life functions. This guide does not represent all beneficial plants that might naturally establish in grassland or old field habitats. For further information on plant benefits to wildlife or identification of wildflowers/weeds consult the following field guides:

Martin A.C., Zim H.S., and Nelson A.L. *American Wildlife & Plants: A Guide to Wildlife Food Habits* Dover Publications Inc., New York

Uva R.H., Neal J.C., and DiTomaso J.M. *Weeds of the Northeast* Cornell University Press

Newcomb, L. *Newcomb’s Wildflower Guide* Little, Brown & Company

# Common Ragweed

- High value wildlife food and cover, common annual in fallow fields
- Seed production is high and rich in oil, leaves fern-like
- Seed persists on plant into winter providing critical winter food source
- Specifically benefits bobwhite quail, mourning dove, ring-necked pheasant, red-winged blackbird; grasshopper, song, white-crowned and white-throated sparrow
- This plant is known to be an allergen to many people



## Queen Anne's Lace (Wild Carrot)

- Biennial plant producing large, showy white flower beneficial to pollinators
- Produces prickly covered seed occasionally eaten by ruffed grouse, ring-necked pheasant and small mammals
- Abundant weed attracting insect activity and increasing diversity of grassland



# Common Milkweed

- Perennial plant producing purplish flower clusters late June to early August
- High value to pollinators attracting abundant insect diversity
- Plant exudes a milk-like sap when broken
- Critical to life cycle of monarch butterflies providing food to caterpillar stage
- High seed production in large tear drop shaped pods



# Goldenrod

- Tall, rigid stemmed perennial often providing patches of dense winter cover
- Produces large yellow flower clusters from August through October
- Common plant of old fields, meadows and conservation plantings
- Attracts insect activity and benefits pollinators
- Benefits songbirds, ruffed grouse, ring-necked pheasant, eastern cottontail, small mammals and white-tailed deer



# Ironweeds

- Showy, rigid stemmed plant found in sunny, moist to wet locations such as old fields, meadows and conservation plantings
- New York Ironweed, pictured below, most common ironweed observed in PA
- Benefits pollinators with large flower heads and retains seed during winter as source of critical winter food for songbirds, game birds and small mammals



# Smartweeds

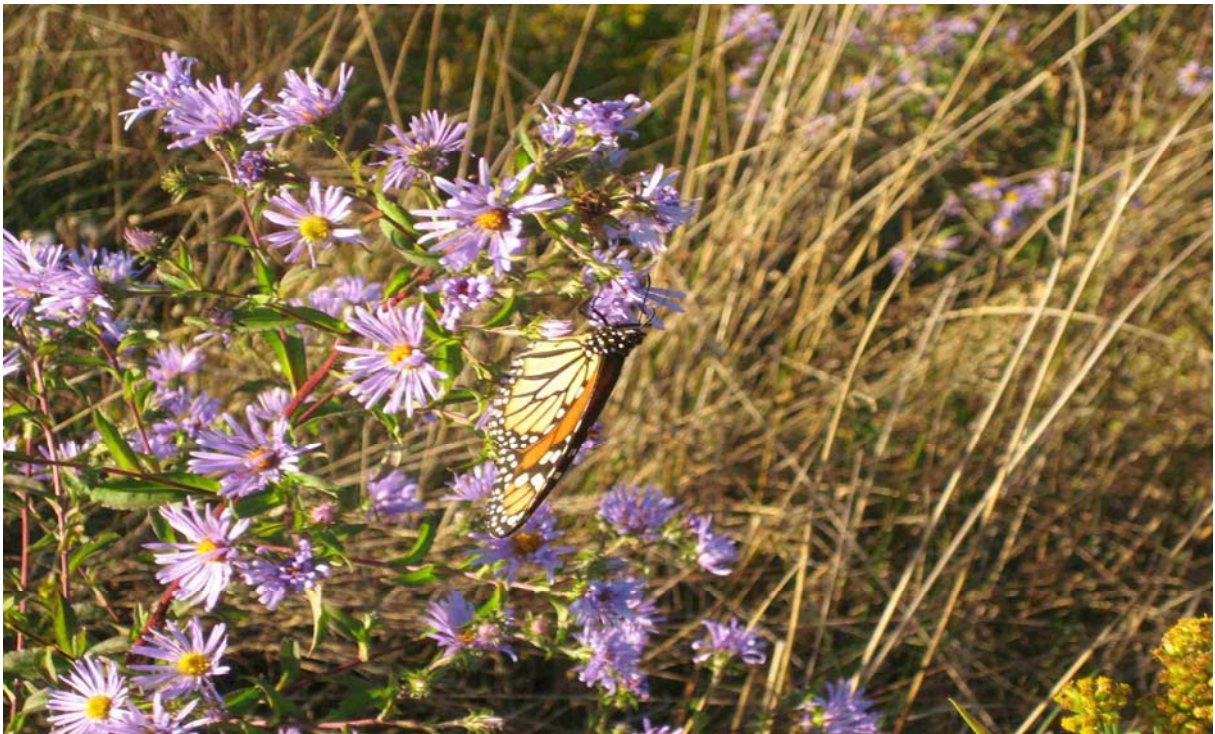
- Commonly found summer annuals tolerating various soil conditions
- Found in wet areas, along edges and in uplands
- Bright pink flowers bloom July to October, form in dense clusters at end of stalk
- Large amounts of seed produced per plant
- High value waterfowl and songbird food source for fall migration
- Benefits black, mallard, pintail and wood duck; rails, bobwhite quail, red-winged blackbird, cardinal, common redpoll; fox, song, swamp, white-crowned and white-throated sparrow; muskrat and raccoon





## Asters & Fleabanes

- Asters are clump forming perennial, bloom late August – October
- Fleabanes are annual and biennial, bloom in early June – September
- Fleabanes with small white flowers, Aster flowers range white to purple; both with central yellow disks
- Both plants tolerate wide range of soil, moisture, and sunlight conditions
- High value to pollinators, improve insect diversity and diversify grassland habitat
- Benefit ruffed grouse, wild turkey, songbirds, small mammals, eastern cottontail and white-tailed deer



# Joe-Pye Weed

- Plant of marshes, wet meadows often growing in small colony
- Produce large, showy flower clusters, blooms August through September
- Seed is an angular nutlet providing food source to waterfowl, songbirds, gamebirds and small mammals
- Large flowers attract high insect activity and benefit pollinators
- Plants can reach 6 ft tall and provide clumps of dense winter and escape cover



# Staghorn or Smooth Sumac

- Colony forming shrub with mature plants in center and small, young plants around the edges; 10-20 ft tall when mature
- Sumac has large leaves containing 9-31 serrate leaflets, serrated edge on **entire** leaf edge, not to be mistaken for tree-of-heaven (1 serrate point at top end of leaf)
- Branches with fine red hairs whereas tree-of-heaven are smooth (no hairs); sumac leaves are non-aromatic whereas tree-of-heaven has a distinctive odor
- Leaves turn orange and red in fall, then drop to expose large, cone-shaped fruit
- High value wildlife food and cover, providing critical winter food source
- Seed/fruit consumed by ruffed grouse, ring-necked pheasant, bobwhite quail, bluebirds, cardinal, robins, catbirds and brown thrashers
- Eastern cottontail, small mammals, and white-tailed deer feed on the bark and twigs and will also consume fruit



# Hemp Dogbane

- Benefits pollinators through production of small white flowers
- Seed produced in long, bean shaped pod
- Attractive to song birds, game birds and small mammals
- Attracts insect activity and adds plant diversity to grass cover



# Blackberries/Raspberries

- High value wildlife food and cover, includes many species of the *Rubus* family
- Berries are one of the most preferred summer foods by wildlife, utilized by ruffed grouse, ring-necked pheasant, bobwhite quail, catbirds, cardinals, grosbeaks, orioles, brown thrasher, bluebirds, cedar waxwings, raccoons, fox, squirrels, bears
- Leaves and stems eaten by cottontail rabbits and white-tailed deer
- Thorny plant when growing in patches provides excellent nesting and escape cover
- Not to be mistaken for highly invasive and noxious multiflora rose, identified by hairs located at the base of the leaflet-see photo→



Blackberries-light green in color on the underside



Raspberries-silvery color on the underside



## Blue Vervain

- Perennial plant that is commonly found in prairies and meadows, low open woodlands, stream banks, springs, seeps, and roadsides
- Plant is 2 to 6 feet in height, producing flowers that are blue to purple spikes that stretch from spike base to the tip, bloom from mid to late summer
- The opposite stem leaves are lance-shaped to narrowly ovate and coarsely serrated
- This native plant can have various shades of flowers from blue to purple which often causes confusion between this plant and purple loosestrife which has smooth leaf edges



# Boneset

- There are several species of boneset with most species being tall, erect plants growing to 2-5 feet in height
- Bonesets are common perennial plants that are native to Pennsylvania and have also been called other names such as feverwort, sweat plant, and thoroughwort
- Flowers are in small heads which together form a broad, flat cluster blooming in July through September
- Boneset prefers a damp environment and is found in marshes and meadows, often at the edge of a wooded area
- The lower leaves are large (4–8 inches long) and become progressively smaller the higher up the plant. The leaves are opposite, spear shaped with toothed edges and pointy tips, and have prominent veins



**RESOURCE CONSERVATION and DEVELOPMENT AREAS  
PENNSYLVANIA**



☆ RC & D Council Office

**Capital RC&D**  
108-109 Church Hall, PSU-Hbg  
777 West Harrisburg Pike  
Middletown, PA 17057  
717-948-6633

**Community Partnerships RC&D**  
23 North Main Street  
Lewistown, PA 17044  
717-248-4901

**Endless Mountains RC&D**  
RR#5, Box 5030D  
Towanda, PA 18848-9354  
570-265-5288 Ext. 5

**Headwaters RC&D**  
478 Jeffers Street  
Building 3, Suite D  
DuBois, PA 15801-2438  
814-375-1372 Ext. 4

**Penn's Corner RC&D**  
214 Donohoe Road, Suite C  
Greensburg, PA 15601-9217  
724-853-5555

**Penn Soil RC&D**  
265 Holiday Inn Road, Suite 3  
Clarion, PA 16214  
814-226-8160 Ext. 5

**Pocono Northeast RC&D**  
1300 Old Plank Road  
Mayfield, PA 18433  
570-282-8732 Ext. 4

**Southeastern PA RC&D**  
1000 East Walnut Street, Suite 704  
Perkasie, PA 18944  
215-453-9527 Ext. 5

**Southern Alleghenies RC&D**  
702 West Pitt Street, Suite 7  
Bedford, PA 15522-8800  
814-623-7900 Ext. 5