

## Allergenic plants

There are plants, even in the desert southwest, that cause people to start sneezing, force their eyes to water and swell, and in short, make them miserable.

Some trees, shrubs, even grasses, produce pollen that some of our bodies just react to, and react badly.

People from the east talk about a villainous plant called “ragweed”. In southern Nevada, there are canyon and desert ragweeds. All of these are members of the genus “*Ambrosia*” – a lovely name for an unlovely plant.

There are others that cause many problems, such as Bermuda grass: the grass that produces the runners and appears uninvited in almost every home landscape. It invades wherever the soil has been disturbed. In the cool weather it goes dormant, but comes back with a vengeance once temperatures start to rise. Control is a challenge, with or without herbicides. (A few experts suggest asphalt; just tar over the area. We do not recommend that!)



American arborvitae

This is not hybrid Bermuda; the hybrids do not produce pollen and are essential elements of lot of warm area turf grasses. The problem is the unhybridized, native form. It produces lots of pollen, which is quite allergenic. The pollen-creating flowers are cream colored asterisks, a little over an inch across. Like so many allergens, the pollen is carried on the wind, from plant, to plant, to us.



Olive Tree

Other blooming plants can cause problems. Although olives grow terrifically well in Southern Nevada, and their trunks become exquisitely sculptured, many of them cause allergies. Trees send out billows of allergenic pollen. For this reason, only a small number of varieties can be used in landscapes. While it would be wonderful to walk outside, pick a few hundred olives and cure them, breathing without sneezing is preferable.

A similar story happens with mulberries.

These were planted around the valley because they get big, give shade, and have pretty bark and leaves.

Unfortunately, their flowers are allergenic, so despite their good characteristics, no new ones should be put in landscapes. A landscape loss improves the quality of life for people with allergies.

All around the valley, there are trees that **may** be problematic to some, but are perfectly acceptable – Arizona ash, for instance. There has been mention of Mexican Palo Verde as an allergenic plant; as if its homicidal thorns were not bad enough.

Some native wild plants are known to cause allergies – bursage, saltbush, even some types of mesquite. And what would the desert Southwest be without sagebrush, another potential allergen?

Fortunately, not everyone has allergies, and no one is allergic to everything. The biggest problems are usually nuisances only part of the year – unfortunately in the spring and fall, when people are most likely to go outside.

Prevention is limited. Keep away from plants with inconspicuous, green or cream colored flowers. Keep Bermuda grass infestations low, and get control before flowering. Avoid planting things you are allergic to, and when you remove the allergens in your yard, do it when not flowering. Save yourself some misery.

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