Bold Splashes of Yellow Adorn the Bethany Beach Landscape in Late Summer and Fall

BBLA Board Member Chip Smith's Reflections on Seaside Goldenrod (Solidago Sempervirens)

[photo from Smith's backyard on Wiegand Lane – 10/1/2023]

It's the time of year when I spend time in my Bethany Beach yard preparing for the change of weather that comes with fall, and ultimately winter. While working along the swale behind my house I noticed several tall, vigorous-looking plants with numerous small, but bold yellow blooms. What I observed is the seaside goldenrod, or salt-marsh goldenrod, a plant that is native to eastern North America and parts of the Caribbean.

Seaside Goldenrod is easy to grow and requires little care. Since this goldenrod species is resistant to the effects of salt spray it is a good choice for our seaside gardens and coastal landscapes. The plants tolerate full sun, and can also thrive in partial shade. This species does not spread by rhizomes. Its yellow flowers are only about ¼ inch wide, but they come in large clusters. Its leaves alternate between jagged and smooth edges. Deadheading spent flower heads can prolong the bloom season well into fall. Removing the flower heads before they go to seed can prevent rampant self-seeding. At the end of the season or in late winter, cut the plant stalks back to a few inches above ground level.

Seaside goldenrod is a short-day perennial which means that the flowering of these plants coincides with shortened photoperiods, signaling that fall has arrived. In Bethany Beach, I start to see the 2.5 to 6-foot-high stalks bursting with yellow flowers in September and in October. These flowers are an important food/energy source for fall migrating monarch butterflies traveling the Atlantic coastal flyway.

It seems that goldenrod does not cause hay fever, or seasonal allergies. Historically, goldenrod was typically applied to the skin to help heal wounds and prevent infections, and Native Americans chewed on the leaves to relieve sore throats or toothaches. Goldenrod has been used to treat tuberculosis, diabetes, asthma, arthritis, and much more – the wonderous complexities of a simple seasonal plant.