Nature Kids: Fall Flower Search

Even though we often think of spring or summer as the time for flowers, there are a lot of fall flowers, too.

Check out the fall flowers in Russ Pitman Park, or your own back yard.

Which colors are the most common?

Which flowers have the most insects on them?

What kinds of insects can you find?

Use the chart below to help you keep track.

Flower (draw it or name it)	Flower Color	Insect and Other Animal Finds: How many insects or other animals did you find visiting this flower? Can you name them? (bees, wasps, butterflies, moths, beetles, bugs, spiders, or other)

Check out the **Teacher's Corner** for information about goldenrod. Goldenrod is one of the prettiest fall flowers that attracts a lot of insects.

Teacher's Corner: The Goldenrod

By Jenni Malone, Director

The goldenrod is a yellow flowering plant in the Family Asteraceae (related to asters). The yellow blossoms of goldenrod set off the bronzes, russets, oranges and purples of the other fall prairie flowers.

Goldenrod often gets mistakenly blamed for the agonies of hay fever sufferers in autumn. It blooms at the same time as ragweed (Ambrosia sp.), which is the real culprit. Ragweed is pollinated by the wind. Using the wind to fertilize flowers is a very chancy business. Only by releasing billions of pollen grains into the wind can a male flower ensure that some will find their way to the female flower of another ragweed plant and produce seeds. Because it is not pollinated by insects, ragweed doesn't need attractive or scented flowers. They are an inconspicuous green color. People suffering from allergies in September look for a flower to blame and goldenrod gets the rap because it is so visible. The pollen grains of goldenrod, like other insect-pollinated flowers, are comparatively fat and sticky so that they will stick to visiting insects and be carried to another flower. In order for a person to be affected by goldenrod pollen, he/she would have to stick their nose right into the flower just like a bee!

Just about every insect with an interest in flowers may by found on goldenrod in autumn. The predators of those insects will be found there, too. Wheel bugs and flower crab spiders, in particular, like to lay in wait for prey on goldenrod clusters. The visiting insects will often use the occasion to get acquainted with each other and breed.

Even a casual observer will notice swollen lumps on the stems of goldenrods. Some will be round and others will be football-shaped. These are called galls and they are the homes of one of two different types of insects that are parasites on the goldenrod. Gall-making insects may be found on a wide variety of plants, but each species of insect is specific to a given species of plant and their galls have a characteristic and recognizable shape and location. The insect larva receives protection from most predators by living in the gall and it uses the inside of the gall for food. However, there are parasitoid wasps that can find these galls, and lay eggs in the insect after penetrating the bulb. Woodpeckers have also learned to blast open the gall and eat the wasp-infested insect holed up in the center.

Goldenrod is also used as a food plant by the larvae of 20 or more moth and butterfly species.

Check out **Nature Kids** for an activity that will have you out looking for goldenrods and other fall flowers and the insects that visit them.