

# When are Seasonal Allergies the Worst?



OTOLARYNGOLOGY  
Associates of Tennessee

For many allergy sufferers, the term "seasonal" can be a bit misleading. While some bothersome allergens do, indeed, come and go as the seasons change, for some, there's always a new crop standing by, ready to offend. For the unfortunate sniffing souls who are allergic to a wide variety of pollen, winter, spring, summer, and fall are all allergy seasons. Essentially, allergies are our immune system's overactive response to pollen or other allergens that release histamines and cause the sniffing, itching, sneezing, and congestion that we're all so familiar with.

Whether you find yourself reaching for the tissues as March turns to April or as July turns to August, here's a month-by-month breakdown of what's triggering your histamines and what you can do to alleviate your allergy symptoms.

## January Allergens

If you live in Nashville, pollen is generally taking a much-needed break by the time the new year rolls around. However, if dust mites are your devils, then winter allergies can be just as worrisome and fall's ragweed. To minimize the mites, use a vacuum fitted with a HEPA filter, replace your furnace filter regularly, change your bedding twice a week, and encase your mattress and pillows with allergy covers. If that doesn't do the trick, a good deep cleaning may help.

## March Allergens

As the world evolves from gray to green, other trees join the allergen stew in March. A great resource for allergy sufferers is the National Allergy Bureau. Before heading out into the wilds of your front yard, be prepared and know the pollen count.

## May Allergens

Happily, tree pollen is starting to back off by the time May rolls around but Mulberry, Sycamore, and Walnut are still pumping out the pollen. Grasses, naturally are still in the mix.

## July Allergens

Good news! By July, grass pollens are backing off but the hot and humid Nashville days are essentially petri dish for mold spores and seeds. If you keep a compost pile or a pile of grass clippings, you may want to limit the time you spend hanging around these mold-happy places. For the sake of your allergies and mosquito-borne illnesses, minimize areas where water can collect and breed all sorts of unpleasantness. To make matters worse, by July, Nashville's air quality takes a dive. Summer air pollution and ozone clouds can make your symptoms even worse. Try to limit your time outdoors when pollutants and allergens are high.

## September Allergens

Ragweed, ragweed, and more ragweed! At this point, if you're hitting the OTC nasal sprays pretty hard, it's time to see a specialist. Overusing nasal decongestant sprays can cause "rebound congestion," which is never a good thing. Basically, after a few days, the blood vessels in your nose that responded to the spray by shrinking, begin to crave the spray and swell even more as they await their next dose. Avoid becoming a spray addict and contact a specialist.

## November Allergens

Happy Thanksgiving! At this point in the season, you're probably starting to feel some relief. Although those bonus warm days can keep the ragweed and mold on your allergy radar, your histamines should be calming down right about now.

## February Allergens

Believe it or not, down here in the South, tree pollen is back in business by the time that February rolls around. Not only that but the precipitation that covers the north in fluffy drifts of snow, becomes a soggy, slushy mess down here in Tennessee. As we all know, soggy messes breed mold and mold, for many, is a particularly nasty allergen. Odds are that it's not the beautiful forsythia that has your nose on high alert, instead, it's likely the Bradford pear pollen that's setting you off.

## April Allergens

April showers bring on major seasonal allergies. Welcome to peak season! Tree, mold, and grass pollen join forces in April to make life miserable. Take heart in the beauty of Tennessee spring and work to keep your glass half full. Or, make an appointment with an allergy clinic to get some much-needed relief from your symptoms.

## June Allergens

While not much has changed by the time summer hits, grasses are still going strong and summer rainstorms can increase the mold levels. If you've been complaining about a summer cold for weeks, odds are you have allergies and it may be time to see a specialist.

## August Allergens

Mold is still out there, but a new nasty takes the spotlight in August: ragweed. Weatherbug writes, "According to the Centers for Disease Control, ragweed, which is actually a flowering plant found near river banks, is the leading cause of allergies, with three-fourths of all sufferers allergic to it. This scourge of sneezers starts to pop up during the latter half of July. The Southeast is usually the first to be subjected to the ragweed pollen season, as it thrives in its hot and humid climate. By late August, ragweed rapidly expands its territory north- and westward, and residents throughout the eastern two-thirds of the U.S. will be feeling itchy and watery eyes."

## October Allergens

If you live in the north, October is generally a good time to get out and enjoy the great outdoors. For those of us who live a little farther south, fall showers bring mold back into the picture and grasses that had been taking a little time off are coming out of dormancy for one last hurrah.

## December Allergens

Fortunately, freezing winter temperatures should be working some Christmas miracles. Pollen is at an all-time low, but if you're celebrating the season with a freshly-cut blue spruce, you may want to leave your new tree in the garage for a few days and then give it a good shake before introducing it to your household. This will help minimize any microscopic spores from unwittingly entering your house.



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