

WINGSTEM

Late summer and early fall are the best times to observe wildflowers that are members of the Composite, Aster, or Daisy Family. Many of us enjoy their attractiveness. However, there is one member of that family that is less attractive than others. That species is the Wingstem (*Verbesina alternifolia* [L.] Britton ex Kearney).

Wingstems are members of the Family *Asteraceae* or *Compositae*, the Subfamily *Asteroideae*, the Tribe *Heliantheae*, and the Subtribe *Verbesininae*. The generic name, *Verbesina*, is from its resemblance to the leaves of *Verbena*. It may also have been a printer's error for *Forbesina*. The specific epithet, *alternifolia*, is Latin for "alternately leaved".

Previous scientific names for this species were *Actinomeris alternifolia* (L.) DeCandolle, *Actinomeris squarrosa* Nuttall, *Coreopsis alternifolia* L., and *Ridan alternifolia* (L.) Britton. Other common names for this plant are Common Wingstem, Golden Honey Pot, Golden Ironweed, Winged Ironweed, Wingstem Crownbeard, Yellow Ironweed, and Yellow Wingstem.

DESCRIPTION OF THE WINGSTEM

Perennial

Height: Its height is 2-13 feet:

Stems: Its stem is erect, rigid, and mostly unbranched. The stem has conspicuous, vertical winged ridges running down the side that extend from a leaf petiole to the base. These stems may have white hairs along the ridges. The younger and smaller plants may not have these ridges. These stems become woody when mature and often persist throughout the winter.

Leaves: Its leaves are simple and alternate. Some of the lower leaves may be opposite or whorled. Each leaf is narrowly elliptic, lanceolate, or ovate. It is about 3-12 inches long, about 1-3 inches wide, glabrous, tapers to the base and to the apex, and has slightly serrated or toothed margins. The leaf petioles flow onto the stem to become the winged ridges. These leaves are bitter tasting and are avoided by White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus* Zimmermann), Eastern Cottontail Rabbits (*Sylvilagus floridanus* J.A. Allen), and other herbivores.

Flowers: The flower heads are about 1-3 inches wide, and are arranged in paniced clusters at the terminal end of the stem. Each cluster may have 20-100 flower heads. The ½ inch wide, greenish-yellow disks of 5-toothed, tubular flowers are loosely spread, rounded, untidy, and mop-like. The 2-10 drooping, pale yellow ray flowers are reflexed backward and spread outward, are about ¾-1¼ inch long, have 3-toothed tips, and are widest in their middle. These rays are often of unequal lengths. Long-tongues Insects (Class *Insecta*), such as Bumblebees (Genus *Bombus*), pollinate these flowers. Its blooming period is 1-1½ months. Flowering season is August to October.

Fruits: Its fruits are achenes or nutlets. These fruits are wide, flattened, and most of them have 2 wings. Its pappus consists of 1-4 bristles.

Habitat: Its habitats consist of moist woodlands, woods' edges, clearings, thickets, fields, pastures, waste areas, bottomlands, streambanks, fencerows, roadsides, and utility rights-of-ways. They are a good indicator of rich, alluvial soil.

Range: Its range covers most of the eastern U.S. as far west as the Great Plains, including Ontario and excluding New England.

REFERENCES

NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION FIELD GUIDE TO WILDFLOWERS OF NORTH AMERICA

By David M. Brandenburg

WILDFLOWERS IN THE FIELD AND FOREST

By Steven Clemants and Carol Gracie

MISSOURI WILDFLOWERS

By Edgar Denison

BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO WILD FLOWERS

By Ethel Hinckley Hausman

WILDFLOWERS OF OHIO

By Robert L. Henn

WILDFLOWERS AND FERNS OF INDIANA FORESTS

By Michael A. Homoya

A GUIDE TO WILDFLOWERS IN WINTER

By Carol Levine and Dick Rauh

EASTERN NORTH AMERICA'S WILDFLOWERS

By Louis C. Linn

NEWCOMB'S WILDFLOWER GUIDE

By Lawrence Newcomb and Gordon Morrison

WILDFLOWERS

By Roger Tory Peterson and Margaret McKenny

WILDFLOWERS OF NORTH AMERICA

By Frank D. Venning and Manabu C. Saito

www.illinoiswildflowers.info/savanna/plants/wingstem.htm