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TITLE: POLLEN SEASON IS HERE

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Pollen season is here. Cars are covered with yellow pine pollen. Allergy sufferers are seeking relief of any kind.

Pollen is the male part of the plant's reproductive system. Pollen can be transferred from tree to tree by air, insects, and other carriers. The wind pollinated trees are designed to release large amounts of pollen. This increases the chance that pollen will get to the female flowers and pollinate them.

The pollen we see now is pollen from trees, mainly pine. Pine pollen has two large wings on it to help it fly through the air. This also helps to make the pollen big enough to be visible to us. Pine pollen is released by the male "cones" on the ends of the branches. The cones release pollen when the humidity is low and the weather is warm and windy.

Pine pollen is very visible and annoying, but not many people are allergic to pine pollen. More people react to the pollen from other trees (oaks, walnuts, and hickories) and plants like ragweed. Although pine pollen may not cause many allergies, it can irritate the eyes and cover our cars and houses.

Dale Dorman, retired UGA Housing Specialist has some suggestions about keeping pollen out of your home. You cannot keep all the pollen out but you can reduce the amount that gets in.

Keep doors and windows closed. Spring is not the time to air out your house. Use air conditioners to ventilate your home instead of opening the windows. Replace air conditioning filter with a new one that can filter out pollen.

According to data collected by Atlanta Allergy and Asthma Clinic, Georgia's pollen season peaks in early to mid-April, recedes in mid-May and resurfaces in mid-August.

Advanced knowledge of high pollen days can help allergy sufferers manage their symptoms. "Allergy Alert" pollen levels from Pollen.com website are measured on a scale of zero to 12. Low is 0 to 2.4, low to medium is 2.5 to 4.8, medium is 4.9 to 7.2, high to medium is 7.3 to 9.6 and high is 9.7 to 12. These levels take into account the amount of pollen that the allergy sufferer is likely to be exposed to for the given period.

Pollen forecasts help those with allergies plan their days in order to minimize the effects of pollen when counts are predicted to be high.

A popular pollen counting website is www.pollen.com. By typing in your zip code, you can get the most up-to-date pollen count and a list of the most prominent types of pollen in your area. In addition to helping allergy sufferers plan when to avoid the outdoors at home, websites like this help them plan for vacations and work trips.