The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA), the leading patient advocacy organization in the U.S. representing 60 million Americans with asthma or allergies, recently released its annual Fall Allergy Capitals™ report. Each spring and fall, Oklahoma City continues to make the list of the top 20 most challenging cities for allergies. This year, Oklahoma City was ranked ninth place and Tulsa was 30th place.

The report identifies the most challenging places to live with fall allergies among the 100 largest metropolitan areas in the U.S. AAFA has published this annual guide since 2003 to raise awareness about the impact of fall allergies; help improve the quality of life for people who experience them by helping people recognize, prevent and manage allergy symptoms; and help communities meet the needs of their residents with allergic diseases.


Kenneth Mendez, AAFA’s President and CEO notes, “AAFA’s annual Fall Allergy Capitals™ report provides important insights into cities where people are most affected by seasonal symptoms from environmental factors like pollen, use allergy medication frequently and don’t have ready access to board-certified clinicians. Whether you live in an allergy capital or not, it’s important to work with your health care provider to recognize the elements that trigger your allergies and determine the best treatment to enjoy your life unrestricted by seasonal allergies.”

Allergies are the sixth leading cause of chronic illness in the U.S. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 8.4 percent of U.S. children suffer from hay fever and 10 percent have respiratory allergies. Nasal allergies affect more than 50 million Americans, and the resulting doctor visits, allergy medicines and other factors contribute to more than $18 billion in health costs.

“Too often, people with seasonal allergies suffer silently while their symptoms worsen year after year,” states Neeta Ogden, M.D. and medical spokesperson for AAFA. “Allergy sufferers need to learn more about triggers and visit a specialist for a proper diagnosis and treatment. Often more can be done to relieve allergy symptoms that interfere with daily life.”

What Can I Do for My Fall Allergies?
Ragweed pollen – the most common cause of fall allergy symptoms – starts to appear in most of the U.S. in August, peaking in mid-September. Other offending fall plants include pigweed, burning bush, cocklebur, sagebrush, mugwort, lamb’s-quarters, tumbleweed and Russian thistle. Mold is also high due to falling leaves that collect on the ground.

You can watch the daily pollen and mold counts on the Oklahoma Allergy & Asthma Clinic’s website and social media (Monday through Friday). On days that pollen is high for ragweed and other weed pollen you are allergic to, you can take these actions to reduce your pollen exposure:
- Limit outdoor activities
- Keep windows closed
- Use central air conditioning with air filtration
- Wear sunglasses when outdoors
- Wear a hat to cover your hair
- Take a shower and shampoo hair

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New Landscape Plant Guide Available

When people with seasonal allergies are looking for relief, they usually think about what’s in their medicine cabinet—not their backyard. A new report published in The Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology: In Practice called, “Landscape plant selection criteria for the allergic patient,” guides both patients and doctors on how to reduce allergen exposures around their home and, in turn, reduce their symptoms.

The report, written by a workgroup formed by the Aerobiology Committee of the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (AAAAI), lists criteria for plants that are less likely to cause allergic reactions, gives tips for people working in the landscaping industry with allergies, and contains a brief sample of trees, shrubs and perennials that may be more appropriate for allergy sufferers.

While there’s no such thing as an allergen-free environment, there are steps people can take to improve their environment and, in turn, experience a few less symptoms according to OAAC retired allergist Warren V. Filley, M.D., FAAAAI, one of the authors of the report and former chair of the AAAAI’s Aerobiology Committee. Dr. Filley is a master gardener and also a board member of the Myriad Botanical Gardens.

“The workgroup came about when I was committee chairman,” said Dr. Filley. “Lay people were asking about what to plant. It took three years putting together this subcommittee and then we came up with the guide to pick the best plants for landscaping. We think it will provide helpful information.”

The guide lists criteria for plants that are less likely to cause allergic reactions, gives tips for people working in the landscaping industry with allergies, and contains a brief sample of trees, shrubs and perennials that may be more appropriate for allergy sufferers.

What to Avoid When Renovating Your Outdoor Space: Trees and shrubs are a great way to add privacy and shade to a landscape, but also can release massive amounts of pollen. When making properties more allergy-friendly, they are as important to keep in mind as weeds and grasses. Maple, ash, birch, elm, oak, cottonwood, cedar, pine, willow, sycamore, walnut and box elder trees, along with juniper, hawthorn and mulberry bushes are all listed as species to avoid.

What to Plant Instead: When looking for alternatives, consider planting flowering dogwood, saucer magnolia, persimmon, common sassafras and Japanese pagoda trees. Smooth hydrangeas, bumalda spirea, burkwood viburnum, blue false indigo, Lenten rose, coral bells, black-eyed Susan, New England aster or beardtongue also make good backyard additions.

While there’s no such thing as an allergen-free environment, there are steps people can take to improve their environment and, in turn, experience a few less symptoms.

All they have to do is determine:

1. Does the plant have insect or wind pollinated flowers? If the plant you’re considering growing in your backyard is wind-pollinated, you may want to reconsider.

“As a general rule, many of the plants that give us allergic trouble are wind

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OAAC Staff Spotlight

Reza Tavasoli is the IT guru/director for the OAAC. Originally from Tehran, Iran, he came to Oklahoma in 2001. He joined the OAAC team in August 2008 part time since he was still in college for his undergraduate degree in computer forensics. After receiving his bachelor’s degree, he was hired full time as the IT manager. He continued his education and received his MBA in 2016 and his title was changed to IT director.

“I’m currently supervising the main and four other satellite offices and their interconnection to our main office. I manage and supervise our servers and their security and also help out the OAAC with their technology and telecommunication needs,” said Reza.

He also serves on OAAC’s events committee team which organizes and sets up activities such as employee appreciation lunches, Thanksgiving and Christmas staff meals and picnics. The committee also helps organize support for the OAAC’s charities it supports such as Positive Tomorrows, Ronald McDonald House food drive and Cavett Kids Camp.

Reza’s day to day activities are very unpredictable since he is the troubleshooter for IT and telecommunications.

“There are times that I have dedicated the majority of my time to a single task as that could affect our whole organization production and patient care. But normally I have several long term and short term projects I focus on daily,” he said.

He is married to Shar, who is currently in nursing school, and they have an 11-year-old daughter. His parents live a mile away so they enjoy spending family activities together. In his spare time, he likes to build computers, wood working and learning basic car mechanics.

“OAAC is not your typical work place, it is more like a big family,” Reza said. “What I like about working at the OAAC is that I matter. The physicians are very close to the employees and do what they can to make all employees happy. The respect and personal attention from the physicians is admirable. I also have a great boss who is also my mentor.”

EpiPen Shortage Causes Problems for Families

Anyone who has serious allergies should always have an EpiPen available at all times. Many schools require families to provide an EpiPen for each child who has allergies. This life-saving drug is an immediate treatment for anaphylaxis, a life threatening reaction to an allergy trigger – food, insect sting or bite, or a medication.

This shortage began last spring. Mylan, who markets EpiPen explained the problem was due to production and delivery issues. With millions of children headed back to school, the demand is exceeding the supply. The generic version of EpiPen has also been in short supply. A new generic epinephrine auto-injector approved by the FDA by Israeli company Teva Pharmaceuticals has not yet been made available in the United States.

In August, the FDA announced extending the expiration dates on specific lots of EpiPens by four months. There are several FDA approved brands of epinephrine auto-injectors such as Adrenaclick and Auvi-Q. They both require a prescription and may not be covered by insurance.

Mylan has a toll free phone number (800-796-9256) to call its customer relations department to find out which pharmacies have EpiPens available.

Stefanie Rollins Receives New Certification

Stefanie Rollins recently received her Certified Asthma Educator designation: AE-C. She joined the Oklahoma Allergy & Asthma Clinic staff in July of 2012. Stefanie is an Advanced Practice Registered Nurse and board certified as a Family Nurse Practitioner. She received her Bachelor of Science in Nursing and Master of Science in Nursing from The University of Oklahoma College of Nursing. She is a member of the Association of Asthma Educators, the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology, and the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology. She is also a member of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners, Association of Oklahoma Nurse Practitioners, and Sigma Theta Tau International Beta Delta-at-Large Chapter.
Teal Pumpkin Project Promotes Inclusiveness

With Halloween fast approaching, the Teal Pumpkin Project encourages adults to provide a non-food alternative to trick or treaters so that children with food allergies can participate. Started by the Food Allergy Research & Education (FARE) in 2014, the Teal Pumpkin Campaign asks that participants place a teal pumpkin on their front porches to indicate that their treats are safe for everyone. This way all children can be included in Halloween festivities.

Food allergies are a life-altering and potentially life-threatening disease and a growing public health issue. In the U.S., one out of every 13 children has a food allergy which amounts to roughly two children in every classroom. For these children, even a tiny amount of an allergen has the potential to cause a severe reaction. Many popular Halloween candies contain nuts, milk, egg, soy or wheat— which are some of the most common allergens in children and adults. Many miniature candy versions have different ingredients than their full size versions. Some miniature candies may not have labels so it is difficult to determine if these items are safe or not for their children with food allergies.

Here is a suggested alternative to candy list from FARE:

- Glow sticks, bracelets or necklaces
- Pencils, pens, crayons or markers
- Bubbles
- Halloween erasers or pencil toppers
- Mini Slinkies
- Whistles, kazoos or noisemakers
- Bouncy balls
- Finger puppets or novelty toys
- Spider rings
- Vampire fangs
- Playing cards
- Bookmarks
- Stickers

Add your address to the official participation map so concerned trick or treaters can plot out a safe route this Halloween. Nonfood treats promote inclusion by providing a safe, fun alternative to children with food allergies and other conditions.

Oklahoma City Ranks Ninth...

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before going to bed to remove pollen from your hair and skin
• Change and wash clothes worn during outdoor activities
• Dry laundry in a clothes dryer, not on an outdoor line
• Limit close contact with pets that spend a lot of time outdoors
• Wipe pets off with a towel before they enter your home
• Remove your shoes before entering your home
• Wash bedding in hot, soapy water once a week
• Rinse the inside of your nose with a nasal rinse to flush out and remove pollen you have inhaled
• Use a CERTIFIED asthma & allergy friendly® air cleaner (portable or whole house/HVAC)

How to reduce your exposure to mold spores outside:

If you have a mold allergy, you may experience symptoms as leaves fall and collect on the ground. But mold can also cause issues year-round. When mold counts are high, there are steps you can take to reduce your exposure to outdoor mold:

• Limit outdoor activities. This will reduce the amount of mold spores you inhale.
• Wear a NIOSH-rated 95 mask and sunglasses or goggles when cutting grass, digging around plants, picking up leaves and disturbing other plant materials.

There are also options available to prevent or treat allergy symptoms:

Over-the-counter or prescription allergy medicines — some work best if you start taking them before the allergy season begins.

Immunotherapy — there are shots or tablets available that are a long-term treatment for pollen allergy. They can help prevent or reduce the severity of allergic reactions.

Talk with your doctor or health care provider months before the fall allergy season begins so you can discuss which treatment is right for you.

The Fall Allergy Capitals report is an independent research project of AAFA.

New Plant Guidelines...

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pollinated plants;” he said. “For example, an elm tree can put out a billion pollen grains when it pollinates and an oak tree can put out 500 billion. Almost all of that pollen stays local, with around 90 percent of it being deposited between 300 feet and two miles from the tree.”

Insect pollinated, also known as entomophilous plants, release far less pollen into the air and are considered a better choice.

2. Is it invasive to your environment or does it cause any adverse reactions? Do a little research to ensure that the plant is not invasive to your area, is not poisonous to people or pets and does not cause stinging or itching when touched.

3. Will it grow well in your area? Lastly, make sure the plant is well suited for the average temperature, altitude, rain levels and sun in your backyard.

The full “Landscape plant selection criteria for the allergic patient” report is available at aaaai.org.