

Pollinator Partnership Spotlight

Plant Profile: Golden Alexanders (*Zizia aurea*)

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It is still spring, and that means that nectar and pollen sources are in high demand for pollinators, and unfortunately can be in short supply in many landscapes. Surprisingly, many established restoration prairies have a deficit in early blooms due to grass dominance, redundant spring fires, and a dearth of late successional spring blooms. One superstar early-bloomer that is a great forb to add to seed mixes is Golden Alexanders (*Zizia aurea*). It is an important food source for short-tongued insects and attracts native bees, wasps, bumblebees, butterflies and true bugs for pollination, and is a larval host for several Lepidoptera,

including the Black swallowtail butterfly (see below). Golden Alexanders does best in full sun, but also does well in oak openings and savannah habitats. It has a broad moisture tolerance, growing in mesic to wet soil conditions but quite tolerant of dry periods in summer. Do not confuse it with Wild Parsnip, another yellow flowering forb in the carrot family that is a non-native and highly invasive. Wild parsnip is a biennial that blooms later, taller, has more leaflets on each leaf, and is often found growing on roadsides. Golden Alexanders is blooming right now in many Wisconsin counties – keep your eyes out for the bright sunshine yellow umbel flowers. There may be some plump swallowtail caterpillars soon to follow.

Golden Alexander (Zizia aurea) is an important host plant for black swallowtails and provides caterpillars with a nutritious food source, shelter from the rain, and protection from predators. The flowers are also an excellent nectar source for adult butterflies. Sometimes, while it might seem like the holes on the leaves of your native plants are from pests, it might actually be the work of hungry caterpillars that grow into important pollinators! Photo: black swallowtail caterpillars on Zizia, by Holly Frainer; photo caption text by Anthony Colangelo, both of Pollinator Partnership



For any questions or conversation, please feel free to reach out! Email ljs@pollinator.org. Let me know what pollinator-related resources would help support your work and promote NRCS pollinator-related conservation practices for landowners.