



Photo by Jeff Vanuga USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

The Pollen Count:

Something to be Thankful For!

Did you know that if it weren't for pollen grains carried on the wind, you wouldn't be able to start each day with a nutritious bowl of cereal or a slice of whole-wheat toast? Sufferers of hay-fever allergies may not feel relieved to know this, but 12% of the world's flowering plants trust their pollen to the passing breezes.

Lacking a need to be colorful living billboards, flowers pollinated by wind are usually pale green and diminutive. They do need to be abundant for very few pollen grains will reach the intended destination. The flowers shed billions of pollen grains from delicately hinged anthers that shake in the wind. In turn, their feathery stigmas, seeking a mate, filter the wind for the arriving pollen.

These humble blossoms rarely get noticed, but without them human societies around the world would collapse from starvation. Wind-pollinated plants that feed the world include the cultivated grains--wheat, corn, rice, barley, oats, rye, and millet--as well as most nuts and the wild grasses that provide forage for livestock.

