

## Packera!

Normally, when I buy plants, I have a list of things that I want to buy and a rough idea of where they're going to go. But one year, on an early spring trip to Pine Ridge Gardens, I was totally charmed by *Packera tomentosa* (or Woolly Ragwort). I bought it on the spot, and it's been one of my favorite spring perennials ever since.

I don't think it's widely known at all – so I wanted to sing its praises(!) and bring up two of its slightly more popular cousins: *Packera aurea* (Golden Groundsel) and *Packera obovata* (Roundleaf Ragwort). All of these plants are early spring bloomers with cheerful yellow flowers that give way to fluffy white seed heads. They all grow in low basal rosettes that shoot up taller flowering stalks (topping out at about 2' in bloom); and they're all deer-resistant, attractive to (small) pollinators, and host for (a small number of) moth and butterfly species.

***Packera tomentosa* (wooly ragwort)** is the best adapted to full sun. In my yard this grows happily in dry clay soils, wet clay soils, and loamy soils (← so it's widely adaptable and relatively easy to grow).

This is a plant that really takes advantage of cool weather. It tends to go dormant in summer, but comes to life again in the fall, stays green through winter, and starts getting ready to flower before many other plants are growing in the spring. The upshot of this growth pattern is that it adds a lot of visual interest in slow seasons and then makes way for plants to fill in behind it. In my experience it seems to spread (modestly) mostly through underground rhizomes (with maybe a small amount of seeding) - so the natural tendency of this plant is to want to grow in a slowly expanding clump.

I really like it in combination with *Penstemon digitalis* (which also has a basal rosette in winter), *Echinacea purpurea* and/or *Amsonia hubrichtii* (which can fill the hole it leaves), and low grasses (like *Eragrostis spectabilis*). Or you can use it with winter annuals like pansies, violas, and snap dragons for a pop of yellow.



***Packera aurea* (golden groundsel)** and ***Packera obovata* (roundleaf ragwort)** are often listed as native ground cover option(s) for shady areas. They are more or less evergreen and (since they also spread by underground rhizomes) will tend to form colonies over time. Though they're quite similar in appearance – these plants are adapted to different growing conditions so if you have wetter soils *P. aurea* is the better bet; where if you have drier soils you should go for *P. obovata*.

I grow golden groundsel, but it is a relatively new addition so I have less opinions about it! On the internet, some of the recommended plant companions are things like Eastern Wood Fern and Christmas Fern - which should make for a pretty and deer resistant combo.

*P. tomentosa* and *obovata* grow in most Arkansas counties; but *P. aurea* has a spottier distribution. (It's been documented in Faulkner and Saline County – but not in Pulaski).

These are not the easiest plants to find, but Pine Ridge Gardens has *P. obovata* in stock (look for it under the synonym: *Senecio obovatus*). And you can order *P. aurea* online from Prairie Nursery. I'll also donate a pot of *Packera tomentosa* and *Packera obovata* for a plant drawing at the March meeting. If you can't be there in person and want a shot at them, just let me know and we'll add you to the drawing. 😊