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*Helenium autumnale*

[Synonyms : *Heleniastrum autumnale*, *Helenium grandicephalum*, *Helenium pumilum*]

**SNEEZEWEED** is a perennial. Native to north-eastern North America it has daisy-like yellow flowers with conspicuous, darker yellow centres.

It is also known as Autumn sneezeweed, Autumn sneezewort, Bitter sneezeweed, Bitterweed, Common sneezeweed, Common sneezewort, Dog fennel, False sunflower, Ox-eye, Sneezewort, *Solbrud* (Swedish), Staggerwort, Swamp sneezeweed, Swamp sunflower, and Yellow star.

Warning – all parts are acrid bitter-tasting (particularly the flower heads) and eaten in large quantities it can be poisonous for cattle, goats and sheep but most especially horses and mules. It can cause staggering, vomiting, diarrhoea, rapid pulse, laboured breathing, extreme sensitiveness, spasms and death. Some authorities note that cows that eat sneezeweed produce bitter tasting milk.

Cultivated varieties range in colour through yellow, bronze, brown and dark red.

*Autumnale* means ‘of Autumn’ with reference to the time of flowering.

Local North American Indian tribes, and subsequently the settlers, used the plant medicinally.

The Menominee and Meskwaki Indian tribes took the dried flowers as snuff (as did the Cherokee, who used the dried leaves) to cause sneezing to clear head colds or ease headaches. The Mahuna Indians also used the plant for some lung problems, while the Comanche took a stem infusion to ease fever. The Cherokee tribe also included a root infusion as an ingredient in a remedy for some female problems.

Sneezeweed is believed to have been introduced to Europe in 1729.