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LOCAL GARDENS THE NEW FRONT IN THE WAR ON ALLERGIES

A leading Australian allergy expert is encouraging green thumbs to consider what they plant in their garden bed this spring in a bid to reduce seasonal hay fever allergies.

Royal North Shore Hospital's Professor Suran Fernando said a new study highlighted the benefits of planting insect-pollinated plants over wind-pollinated varieties in their garden.

The study found that while pollen allergy sufferers will never completely alleviate their symptoms, planting insect-pollinated plants will go some way to control their symptoms.

"Eliminating pollen exposure is not completely practical but this year the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology has advised that the planting of insect-pollinated plants may reduce symptoms in allergic pollen sufferers," Prof Fernando said.

"Wind-pollinated species produce large quantities of pollen grains, which can cause seasonal hay fever symptoms in sensitised individuals. Hay fever can make life miserable and using the right plants in the garden may help local sufferers with their symptoms."

Popular types of insect-pollinated plants include tulips, magnolias, poppies, and orchids, while common wind-pollinated plants include cypress, sycamore and birch trees, ragweed and plantain weeds, and rye.

Prof Fernando encouraged pollen allergy sufferers to:

- become familiar with online pollen predictors (e.g. www.sydneypollen.com.au), and use them
- try to stay indoors and keep the windows closed in windy weather, after thunderstorms and on high pollen count days
- plant insect-pollinated flora rather than wind-pollinated species, if possible
- shower and put on clean clothes after being outdoors for an extended period when pollen is high

Prof Fernando said seasonal hay fever and asthma sufferers concerned about managing their symptoms, or who have experienced an increase in symptoms, should see their doctor.