

## Pause for Evening Primrose

### Rapunzel, Rapunzel...let down your golden hair!

Rapunzel, a wildflower (*Oenothera biennis*) known here as "Evening Primrose," is producing its golden yellow blossoms along Southeastern roadsides in from July to September. Each evening some open and remain open all night, closing the next morning. Its pollinators are mainly moths that are active at night. Flowers may open so rapidly at dusk that they can be caught in the act!



Colony of Evening Primrose on HWY. 185 near intersedtion of HWY 25 at Hodges, SC on 8/14/2014.



Close up of three primrose blossoms.

Though native to temperate regions of America, Evening Primrose species have been naturalized in Europe, where they have long been valued for food and medicine. The plant is called "rampion" or "rapunzel" in German. The roots are harvested, cooked and used in salads. It is the same healthful, edible herb that is featured in Grimm's fairy tale, and for which the child Rapunzel was named! Many of the web sites with information about this species originate in Germany.

Evening Primrose's genus name, *Oenothera*, comes from Greek oinos, "wine," and theria, "to imbibe". This refers to an ancient use of the plant to flavor wines. The species name *biennis* is actually factual, because they are biennials. Their seeds grow into a low leafy rosette, or circle of ground hugging leaves during their first year, then in their second year, they produce a tall (up to 5 feet) leafy blooming stalk with flowers concentrated at the tips. There are several other species of Evening Primrose that grow in our area, including another large flowered yellow one called "Sundrops." Then there's a lovely spring blooming pink species the Showy Evening Primrose, *Oenothera speciosa*. Many of these are available now at garden shops for home planting as ornamentals.



Swallowtail sipping primrose nectar.



Showy Evening Primrose blossoms.

Evening Primrose seeds contain high concentrations of essential fatty acids , gamma-linolenic acid (GLA) and linoleic acid (LA.) Our bodies convert GLA to a hormone-like substance called "prostaglandin," which has anti-inflammatory properties. There is evidence that GLA is effective for treatment of patients with rheumatoid arthritis. A number of animal studies have demonstrated that evening primrose oil (EPO) reduces blood cholesterol as well as to lowers LDLs and increases HDLs. Anticancer activity has been demonstrated in laboratory trials, and skin conditions such as eczema and scleroderma have responded to supplements of EPO. As with all herbal remedies, consult a doctor before use!

The common name "primrose" refers to more than one plant group. True primroses are members of a different plant family, Primulaceae. These are some of the first wildflowers to bloom in the spring, especially in Europe. Primrose means "first" rose.