

August Plant of the Month:



Apocynum cannabinum L., Indian Hemp, Common Dogbane

The Plant of the Month for August is the Common Dog bane or Indian hemp, *Apocynum cannabinum* L. August is supposed to be New Jersey's hottest month and the old saying dog days of summer reflect on the normal hazy, hot and humid weather conditions that stall over our state in later summer. The dog-bane is a herb that is related to the milkweeds. Break a stem and you will see the same milky latex oozing from the broken plant tissue. The plant is found State-wide in open dry to moist fields, roadsides and waste places. It is a native but acts as a weed. It's flower is a small inconspicuous white cluster that bears single five lobed tubes on long flower stalks. These mature into twin pods called follicles. Native Americans have used this plant and its extracts for drugs (dermatological aid, cough medicine, kidney and pulmonary aids, anti-diarrheal), food, and fiber for fabric and netting. Dr. Fairbrothers' told a story of New York prison inmates smoking some herb that the prison guards didn't know. Upon an inspection of the prison grounds, Dr. Fairbrothers found the prison yard filled with the weeds of New York, one of which was Indian hemp. Apparently some of the inmates knew of its name and attempted to smoke it like the other hemp. They would have done better to weave rope instead of burning their possible route of escape!