

**2013**  
**April Plant of the Month**



**Yellow or Winter Cress**  
***Barbarea vulgaris* R. Br.**

As April slowly warms, one of the earliest plants to color our open fields is winter cress, *Barbarea vulgaris*. This plant is a non-native that established itself as a member of our flora early during the colonization of North America. Winter cress, also known as garden yellow rocket, is a member of the mustard family. Brassicaceae or as it was once known Cruciferae is well represented in Northern Europe and many of its species have immigrated to North America. New Jersey has few native mustard species and those that are native normally occupy undisturbed habitats. The winter cress enjoys the open habitats around roadsides, farm fields and waste lots.

*Barbarea vulgaris* is one of the first species to flower each spring. The yellow racemes are visible throughout the agricultural areas of the state and there are occasionally harvested as bitter mustard along with broccoli robe (*Brassica* sp.) and other early mustards harvested for their flower buds.

Like all mustards, the flowers have four petals. This four part structure is a characteristic carried throughout the mustard family, providing a basis for the earlier family name associated with a cross shape flowers. Winter cress is a biennial herb, setting seed mid-summer that germinates and over winters as a characteristic basal rosette. The 1-4 basal leaf segments differentiate it from a close cousin, *Barbarea verna*, a species with 4-10 pairs of leaflets along the basal rosette leaves.