

February 2014 Plant of the Month



Persicaria perfoliatum (L.) H. Gross Mile a Minute or Chinese tearthumb

The January *Plant of the Month* is highlighting a noxious weed that has invaded Eastern United States with a vengeance. Mile a minute, *Persicaria perfoliatum*, is a member of the smartweed family, Polygonaceae. It is one of a few weak stemmed, creeping, prickled smartweeds in the Flora's region; the others being *P. arifolium* and *P. sagittatum*, which are native species. *P. scandens* is a smooth creeping native species. *Persicaria perfoliatum* is a non-native annual that was introduced in our region in the early 1930s. It has spread steadily and now the plant can be found throughout New Jersey. The plant produces large seeds that are eaten by birds. Species that grains and seeds such as sparrows, cow birds, grackles, thrushes and others can spread the plant far and wide. The annual strategy the plant has adopted is quite successful making it very difficult to eradicate. Eradication is difficult and is best achieved if a colony can be caught early. Manual pulling is the best treatment, it kills the entire plant. Herbicides such as Roundup have varying effects.

Today, the largest concentrations are around the Delaware River, Raritan River and interior farmlands were rich, wetland soils provide optima habitat. I have seen Mile a Minute in Cumberland, Salem, Gloucester, Camden, Burlington, Mercer and Monmouth Counties. Reports from other botanists spread the plant to all counties and it can be expected on enriched soils except in the Pine Barrens Outer Coastal Plains and the Delaware Bay-shore, where the plant has yet make a strong toe hold.