

## May 2016 Plant of the Month



*Lithospermum arvense* L., Corn Gromwell

*Plant of the Month* for May is a non native annual and a member of the Borage family now a permanent member of our upland flora. *Lithospermum arvense*, the corn gromwell, is an infrequent roadside annual. Mary Hough (1983) maps the plant in thirteen of our twenty one Counties, excluding the northwestern and Pine Barrens Counties.

*Lithospermum arvense* grows in an interesting niche, many times occupied by upland natives such *Danthonia spicata*, *Dichanthelium spherocarpon* and *Carex albicans* var. *emmonsii*. I recently crossed paths with our Plant of the Month in the village of Malaga, Gloucester County. Here, it was growing on an occasionally mowed road edge with *Myosotis arvense*, *Valerianella locusta*, *Vicia tetraspermum* and *Danthonia spicata*. At first glance I was thinking the plant could be the rare false gromwell, *Onosmodium virginianum* (S1). They both are Borage family members, and both have annual habits, with alternate leaves. In fact, *Lithospermum arvense* is the only alternate leaf in the genus *Lithospermum*. The key to the identification is the flower color and structure. *Lithospermum* is white, open 5-cleft flowers whereas the false gromwell is yellow, barely open, scorpioid flowers.

Native Americans throughout North America used other native *Lithospermum* species prior to the introduction of the annual *arvense*. The native species provided analgesic and anti-hemorrhagic poultices and infusions. Corn gromwell is edible and used as a salad green. Our annual species should be visible on stable roadside and in open upland woods of the Delaware and Raritan Valleys through the month of May.

JRA, 5/2016