

February 2017 Plant of the Month



Senecio vulgaris L., Common Groundsel, Old-man-of-the-Spring, or Annual Ragwort

Common Groundsel is February's *Plant of the Month*. It is a non-native herb that has been a naturalized member of our flora for many years. It comes to our monthly attention because it has expanded its range within New Jersey in the last decade, and it is worth a closer look. The relatively mild winter of 2016/2017 allowed this plant to be in bloom on New Year's Day, and it is appropriate to have a flowering plant for the Plant of the Month!

Senecio vulgaris is a native of Eurasia and North Africa. USDA Plants Database maps the plant in North America with populations in all 50 states, in the Western Yukon and Greenland. It grows to about 8-10" tall, has no ray flowers and shows a weedy habit by growing in gardens, roadside, sidewalk cracks, nearly any site with sufficient space for rooting. The plant is described by taxonomic manuals as an annual, yet it acts like a biennial as well. It is described as being a frost resistant plant capable of tolerating a wide range of temperatures and altitudes. It is toxic to livestock as well as humans, and is listed as a noxious plant by the USDA (Wikipedia, 2017).

Botany is usually a quite endeavor in the winter. A quick search of your neighborhood may turn up this little flowering plant at any time, thus extending your botanical experiences. Keep a sharp eye to the ground in disturbed habitats to see this plant in full flower in the dead of winter!

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