

July 2018 Plant of the Month



Hibiscus moscheutos L., Rose Mallow, Marsh Mallow, or Swamp Mallow

July's *Plant of the Month* is rose mallow. *Hibiscus moscheutos* includes *Hibiscus palustris*, which is a synonym used by many older texts. *Hibiscus* is a member of the Mallow family, Malvaceae. Mary Hough (1983) identifies the species as a common plant statewide, becoming local in North Jersey. Specimens have been collected from every county except Passaic, Sussex and Warren. Stone (1910) describes masses of flowers along the Delaware River marshes in August, becoming a sea of blooms, and possibly the most extensive display of color in the region's flora.

Rose mallow is described as a perennial herb by the taxonomists M.L. Fernald, 1950. Our plants act as perennial herbs, with the stems dying each winter, replaced by new shoots the following spring. The flowers are some of the largest in the New Jersey flora. Blooms can approach 12-15 cm across, and are produced in a variety of color combinations. The species is described with pink to purple petals, with "forma" Peckii producing creamy white flowers with a crimson center.

Marsh mallow is a true wetland plant. It is given the obligate wetland designation by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Plants growing in the Flora's region occupy freshwater and brackish tide marshes, lake edges and open wetlands. The plants begin their flowering display by the end of the month, and anyone in the vicinity of a marsh should be on the lookout for this beautiful member of our flora.

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