

November 2018 Plant of the Month



Nymphaea odorata Ait., Fragrant Water-lily

The November *Plant of the Month* is a native aquatic flowering species selected to remind ourselves of the exceptionally wet 2018 growing season. For those botanists not tracking this unusual weather, the state is about 10-12" above the normal seasonal average. Monmouth County botanists have experienced as much as 15" more! *Nymphaea odorata* is a species that is surely thriving in this wet environment. True aquatic species such as *Nymphaea* are adapted to the rigors of a water environment. Fragrant water lily is found in lakes, ponds and sluggish acidic streams, specifically those without significant eutrophication. The plant is common to all New Jersey counties, and Mary Hough's *New Jersey Wild Plants* (1983) shows herbarium specimens exist for every county except Warren, the urban counties Bergen, Union and Hudson, and curiously Cumberland where we know it thrives.

Most of our water lily population is the typical form. There are, however, two other subspecies in New Jersey: ssp. *tuberosa* (formerly *N. tuberosa*; Bergen, Sussex, Mercer, Burlington and Cape May) and ssp. *odorata* (formerly *N. odorata* var. *gigantea*; Passaic). New Jersey is also home to a rose colored petal form whose taxonomic position is suspect. USDA cites it as a synonym of *N. odorata* ssp. *tuberosa*, whereas known specimens of typical *N. odorata* have exhibited the rose petal form.

Nymphaea odorata has been used as a medicine and unspecified food by the Native Americans, as well as becoming established in the horticultural trade. The Chippewa, Mic-mac, Ojibwa and Penobscot groups used the leaves and roots in as a dermatological aid. Pulverized roots were used for mouth sores, swellings, and as a cough medicine. Recent uses add the plants natural beauty to pond and lake plantings. Fragrant water lily normally flowers into September, but I know it is still flowering so take advantage of this before old man winter shows his presence!
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