

March 2019 Plant of the Month



Smilax glauca Walter; Cat Greenbriar; Cat Briar; or Glaucous-leaved Greenbriar

March 2019's edition of the **Plant of the Month** showcases a much overlooked member of New Jersey's flora. The plant is an upland, woody perennial plant, with weak and narrow stemmed vines. It's a member of the family Smilacaceae, the Smilax family. This plant was once in the Lily family, but recent genetic and clad analysis determined it is a stand-alone family. Mary Hough (1983) found the species Statewide. Her map does not show specimens from Sussex, Passaic, Gloucester or Salem counties. The USDA Plants Database maps the northern counties with the green briar's presence. My personal experience and recent observations can confirm the plant grows in the Salem and Gloucester counties.

New Jersey's flora includes nine members of the genus: *Smilax glauca*, *S. herbacea*, *S. hispida*, *S. laurifolia*, *S. pseudochina*, *S. pulverulenta*, *S. rotundifolia*, *S. tamnoides*, and *S. walteri*. Each is identified and separated by characteristics such as stem size, leaf form, stem prickles, or the lack thereof. *Smilax glauca* is a narrow stemmed, weakly prickled plant most often found on dry or drought prone sands and loams, under hardwood and coniferous canopies. A distinct character of this plant is the glaucous waxy coating found on the underside of the leaf. This character is shown on the leaf to the right in photo above. The plant is semi-evergreen, retaining most previous season's leaves until spring.

Smilax glauca and its relatives are important wildlife foods. Both seeds and stems are eaten by birds and mammals. The seeds that become ripe in autumn are utilized by migrating birds, grouse, and small mammals. Native Americans used the plant for medicine (analgesic, anti-rheumatic, and gastrointestinal aids), and food (new growth and roots).

The plant can be found year round in upland woodlands throughout New Jersey.

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