

## July 2019 Plant of the Month



*Verbascum lychnitis* L., White Mullen

July 2019's **Plant of the Month** is one of New Jersey's non native members. The Flora of NJ often highlights New Jersey's non-native flora. Whether plants are long-standing natives with thousands of years of a North American presence, or a plant that just arrived on our shores, we make note of its interesting features and characters. It is clear from the various species we select to highlight each month that New Jersey's flora is rich in species from lands far afield. White Mullen is such a plant. It is a member of the Figwort family, Scrophulariaceae, with its original distribution in Europe. It is a native from Central Russia through most of Europe north of the Mediterranean region. It arrived in New Jersey, and has been a presence in the northern counties. The Flora of the British Isles (Clapham, Tutin, and Moore, 1987) describes it as a plant of waste places and calcareous banks. Its distribution in New Jersey mirrors this European distribution description. Mary Hough (1983) described the species as a plant of the Delaware Valley, with historic records from Atlantic County.

White Mullen differs from New Jersey's other *Verbascum* genus members by the flower stalk and the flower colors. Most new botanists are introduced to Common Mullen, *Verbascum Thapsus*, early in their botanical studies. Its large hairy leaves and yellow flowers on a single spike are characters that is distinguishable from afar. A similar yellow Mullen, the Claspingleaved Mullen, *Verbascum phlomoides*, resembles Common Mullen, with the added field characters such as clasping cauline leaves and bright orange stamens. The White Mullen differs from these two relatives by its white flower color as well as its branched flowering stalk.

Mullen's entrance into North America was not unnoticed by Native Americans. Many tribes, including the local Delaware people, recognized it as a plant with medicinal uses, such as an analgesic, an anti-rheumatic balm, and as a pulmonary aid.