

## 2012 September Plant of the Month



**Water-willow, *Decodon verticillatus* (L.) Ell.**

Water willow should be a familiar sight to botanists exploring our waterways as well as those canoeists and freshwater fishermen among us. It is a common sight along many of the states's open waters where mucky substrates exist. Common habitats include lake edges, open stream banks and shallow ponds.

Water willow is a member of the loosestrife family, Lythraceae and can be seen around lakes and pond during September. *Decodon* flowers in late summer at the tips of growth of the season branches. Its light pink colored corolla is highlighted by dark pink stamens. The flowers are produced in leaf axils and mature from the branch tip down, resulting in large capsules that contain the season's seeds.

Mary Hough (1983) maps water willow throughout the entire state, and the plant has its widest distribution in the quite waters of the Outer Coastal Plain where its habitat is very common. Water willow responds positively to nutrient enrichment and the resulting eutrophication can accelerate this plant to become a local weed. Lakes downstream of enriched waters can be completely covered by the arching stems of *Decodon*. *Decodon* can alter shallow open water habitat by creating areas where sediment deposition of suspended very fine textured silt and clays can occur. Land is slowly built as sediment collects around the tip of the arched stem and anchored by new roots produced where it touches the water. Other wetland emergent plants soon follow.

Take some time to explore the quite waters of New Jersey's rivers and lakes and you'll be rewarded with great displays of fall blooming plants that will no doubt include *Decodon verticillatus*, the September Plant of the Month.