

2012 November Plant of the Month



Verticillate Mountain Mint - *Pycnanthemum verticillatum* (Michx.) Pers.

As the 2012 growing season comes to a close there will be fewer and fewer plants that are identifiable from the previous season's flowers. November's Plant of the Month retains its unique characters making the plant visible well into winter. The verticillate mountain mint is a New Jersey native infrequently found in old fields, both wet and dry, throughout the state. It is a member of the mint family and its square stem is a quick give away. Other identifying features include triangular flowering bracts, white tubular flowers, short pilose-hairy stems and lanceolate leaves.

The mountain mints are known for their distinctive smell that is created when the stem or leaf is crushed. This odor is created by aromatic hydrocarbons that are retained by the skeleton after the growing season. This provides an easy way to determine if the dead herb is a mint and the odor is distinct enough to determine it is a mountain mint. The plants retain their flowering heads thus making the bract identification possible well into the winter months.

So the next time you are walking through an old field keep your eye out for the round dark heads of this mountain mint. It will make your day when everything else is drab and dry.