

**2013
June Plant of the Month**



Common Blue Iris, aka Poison Flag, or Clajeux

***Iris versicolor* L.**

June is a wonderful time to view New Jersey's wildflowers. Warm temperatures and sufficient rain welcomes a wide array of species. This includes plants such as blue iris. Our plant of the month is a common wetland monocot found in every New Jersey County. It grows in open wet meadows, lake edges, stream banks and spring seeps. The light blue-purple color and wide "flag" petals provides an easy identifying marker. The leaves are distinctive as well. Blue iris has curved, light yellow green leaves. This may be the best identifying feature in late summer after the flowers have long passed. It is pollinated by a variety of native bees and produces large green capsules in the fall that disperse its flattened, dark brown seeds on the water where they are carried to a new home.

Our two other naturalized species, *Iris prismatica* and *Iris pseudoacorus*, are strikingly different. *Iris prismatica* is a native slender dark purple-blue iris with narrow petals. This species is confined to the acid wetlands. I know it from the pinelands and outer coastal plain savannas. Mary Hough indicates it decrease to the northern counties, and is mainly in glaciated areas. *Iris pseudoacorus* is an introduced yellow iris. Its yellow petals and stiff upright, dark green leaves differentiate this species from the two blue irises. Its habitat is freshwater tidal marshes of the Atlantic draining rivers, Hudson and Delaware Rivers and interior lake edges.

Whether you are paddling New Jersey's streams and rivers or just cruising by in your car keep your eye on the open wetlands near you. The blue colors you'll see are probably our beautiful native, June's Plant of the Month, Common Blue Iris.