

August 2013 Plant of the Month



Sweet autumn virgin's bower

Clematis terniflora DC.

August Plant of the Month is a vine that has become a common sight throughout most of the State in the last 25 years of the 20th century. Sweet autumn virgin's bower is a woody vine that persists on roadsides, disturbed sites, wetland edges and anywhere moist soils and ample sun makes their presence possible. This clematis was transported here for ornamental use and its escape is another plant lesson taught over and over after each new introduction. Alfred Rehder's Manual of Cultivated Trees and Shrubs Hardy in North America (1927, reprinted 1986) reported *Clematis paniculata* v. *dioscoreaefolia* was introduced into cultivation from Korea in 1911. *Clematis terniflora* out competes normally aggressive native vine species such as *Mikania scandens* and *Clematis virginiana*. The plant produces sweet smelling flowers in great abundance, making quite a show when in the right habitat. It is a common sight in late summer: sweet autumn virgin's bowers draping shrubs and lower branches of trees on road sides throughout the Piedmont and Coastal Plan Counties.

Clematis terniflora is in the Ranunculaceae, the buttercup family. New Jersey has 3 members of the genus including sweet autumn virgin's bowers. The other two are native: *Clematis occidentalis* v. *occidentalis*, (*sun. verticilatus*), the purple or mountain clematis, is a rare species (S2) confined to the Highlands and Valley and Ridge Counties, and *Clematis virginiana*, the Virgin's bower our most visible native that can be seen on rich, moist soils near streams and wetlands.