

September 2014 Plant of the Month



Eutrochium dubium (Willd. ex Poir.) E.E. Lamont, Coastal Joe-pye-weed

The September plant of the month is the one of our native composites, the coastal joe pye weed. New Jersey is home to a number of joe pye weeds, including the spotted stemmed, purple stemmed and hollow stemmed species. Our coastal species is visible in all southern counties and its range extends into Northeast New Jersey along the Hudson River draining floodplains as well as into the glaciated interior counties. It appears to be absent from our Highland and Valley and Ridge regions. Coastal joe pye weed is a common species. It is also a wetland species, often found in wetland pastures, non-tidal marshes and along the edges of our tidal wetlands.

Eutrochium dubium has a number of formal names. Our regional manuals from Fernald and Gleason identify it with the genus *Eupatorium*. Recent nomenclatural change places it in the genus *Eupatoriadelphus*. The current scientific analysis has changed that name one additional time to the current Latin binomial in the genus *Eutrochium*. This seemingly endless change and re-assignment indicates the rapid advances in our understanding of the genomic structure of the genus and family, Asteraceae. This change has broadened our understanding of how species can seem on the surface to be similar yet come from very different roots. This is an example of a visible convergent evolution.

Early Americans and Native Americans used this plant for a variety of medicines particularly for kidney and other dietary ailments. It has a history of treatments for typhoid fever and its name may bear some tie to that use. The author of the Field Notebook website cites two derivations for its name: a Native American medicine man named Joe Pye who traveled New England spreading this plant as a typhoid treatment. It is also reputed the name comes from the native language that used jopi as a name for typhoid, thus the use of the name with this medicinal plant. Either story is compelling. Both add to the mystery of the plant. Coastal joe pye weed is also a wonderful native garden plant, blooming in early August and lasting until late September or early October. Butterflies love this plant, so do a variety of bees and wasps.

So the next time you are exploring, keep your eye on the roadside ditches and open wet fields. That splash of pink and purple growing with Indian grass and the goldenrods is probably our plant of the month Coastal joe pye weed.