

## January 2015 Plant of the Month



*Potentilla canadensis* L., Dwarf Cinquefoil

The January *Plant of the Month* is the dwarf cinquefoil. January is a difficult month to describe plants, especially in an attempt to be seasonal. This tiny Rose family member highlights the small and diminutive part of our flora that often requires a lowered stature or even crawling on one's belly to get a better look. This plant fits that description perfectly.

It is the smaller of the two common creeping cinquefoils that are native to the State. The other species is the common cinquefoil, *Potentilla simplex*. These differ by the general leaf shape, stature and creeping habit. *Potentilla canadensis* is a creeping species, but the creeping is limited to a few inches surrounding the root. This differs from its larger cousin, which creeps freely many feet from its original point of rooting. The point upon the stem the first flower appears is also a helpful identification between the two similar plants. *Potentilla canadensis* flowers from the first leaf axil whereas *Potentilla simplex* flowers from the second or third axil onward. The dwarf cinquefoil is smaller in every anatomical comparison.

The species is quite widespread and should be found in every upland hardwood and mixed hardwood-conifer forests in New Jersey. Mary Hough (1983) describes the species in every county with the exception of the three northern tier counties abutting New York: Sussex, Passaic and Bergen yet absent in the Pine Barrens. Although absent in the heart of the heaviest fire prone forests, it is a common species on Bridgeton gravels and other surface geological conditions south and west of the Mullica River.

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