

September 2015 Plant of the Month



Vernonia noveboracensis (L.) Michx., New York Ironweed

September's *Plant of the Month* evokes the start of fall, beginning of the end for growing season 2015. As the season progress toward winter, the riot of autumn flowers will be upon us and among this group is New York Ironweed, *Vernonia noveboracensis*. This plant's deep purple colored flowers are easily to see in wet meadows, along open stream banks and in our open marshes. New York ironweed is one of two native ironweeds. The other, *Vernonia glauca*, is an extremely rare plant from the lower Delaware River valley. Any other species found in the state would be an escape from wildflower gardens.

Mary Hough (1983) cites ironweed specimens from all New Jersey counties with the exception of Atlantic and Cumberland. I personally know the plant grows in each of these counties so the missing data is just a collection oversight, making this a State-wide plant. When found it is often in mass arrays with joe-pyeweed, swamp milkweed, purple vervain and our wet tolerant goldenrods. I witness one such meadow this morning driving through rural Mannington Township, Salem County. There, an entire five-acre pasture was a blaze in purple from hundreds of stalks of New York ironweed. Alight on the plants were dozens of butterflies and other pollinators. Witmer Stone (1910; p 731) described meadows in the Middle District with a similar species mixture more than a century ago.

As a native species, our American ancestors used this for a variety of treatments such as toothaches, an analgesic after childbirth and as an infusion for stomach ulcers and hemorrhages. Today, the species is all but over looked. It is too common for most botanists to arouse special interests and inconspicuous during most of the year to be of much interest to most gardeners. When it's in bloom, however, everyone notices, both for its beauty and the signal that the end of the growing season is approaching.

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