

## October 2015 Plant of the Month



*Pluchea odorata* (L.) Cass. var. *succulent* (Fernald) Cronquist, Salt-marsh Fleabane

October's *Plant of the Month* is a widespread plant of the salt marsh. New Jersey's saline marshes form our eastern boundary and within this zone, salt marsh fleabane is quite common. Salt marsh fleabane lives on marshes with saltwater influences. *Pluchea* occupies brackish and true salt marshes with measurable salinity above 5%. The plant is an annual and grows on all terrestrial hydric zones between short form *Spartina alterniflora* and the marsh ecotones to non-tidal habitats. The US Fish and Wildlife Service rank this plant as an obligate wetland species (OBL).

A synonym for this plant is *Pluchea purpurescens* var. *succulenta* and lists under this obsolete name in older taxonomic literature. Mary Hough (1983) cites herbarium records for *Pluchea* from all coastal and tidal river counties. The plant is common where suitable habitat exists, such as on the Atlantic and saltier Delaware Bay marshes. Flowers are visible between September and the end of October when the marsh grasses fade from green to tan. At this time, the bright green fleabane leaves and its light purple disk flowers are a distinct contrast to the tan cord grass. It appears as a light purple haze where colonies exist.

Salt marsh fleabane is a native species and a member of the Asteraceae. Although I have no known local use, Native Americans from other parts of the genus' distribution used other similar species in decoctions from dried leaves. This was used to reduce fevers and treat piles.

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