

April 2017 Plant of the Month



Chimaphila maculata (L) Pursh, Spotted Wintergreen or Spotted Pipsissewa

April's *Plant of the Month* is another of NJ's curious little evergreen, *Chimaphila maculata*, the Spotted Wintergreen. The common name would have one thinking this plant is a relative to the ericaceous common wintergreen, or teaberry *Gaultheria procumbens*, but that is not the case. Both are in the same order of plants, but not the same families. Spotted wintergreen is in the Pyrolaceae, the Wintergreen family, and is related to shinleaf, Indian pipes and pine-drops. Its closest relative in our region is *Chimaphila umbellata*, the Pipsissewa.

Spotted wintergreen is a native to the eastern forests and has its natural range between New Hampshire, west to southern Illinois, south to Tennessee, Alabama and Georgia. Mary Hough (1983) records specimens from all 21 counties, and considers the plant frequent. Stone (1910) uses seven words to say it's a common plant. My experience finds the plant strictly in uplands, and usually in a mature deciduous forest or edge of woodland under low bush blueberries, huckleberries and other common forest ground covering shrubs. The plant flowers in June, producing a fragrant, nodding, waxy, 5-petaled white flower. Fruits are capsules that mature in autumn.

The plant was well known to native Americans who used the plants for a variety properties from eating the leaves as a snack to the treatment for pain, rheumatism, fevers, all the way to a poison to kill rats! This is one plant that is visible throughout the year. Cure the March winter blast with a trip to your nearby woodland, and while you are there be sure to look for the April Plant of the Month, Spotted Pipsissewa.

JRA, 4/2017