

June 2017 Plant of the Month



Trientalis borealis Raf., Northern Star-Flower

June's *Plant of the Month* is a widely distributed native North American herb that is found through New Jersey. Northern star-flower's range includes most of the Northeastern States. It grows as far south as the mountains of Georgia, north to Quebec. It occurs in most Canadian provinces, and reappears on the West Coast of the United States. The plant grows in closed canopy woodlands. This includes moist and wet forests, dominated by deciduous and conifer species. In New Jersey, it prefers shaded moist slopes for the northern counties, whereas it occupies hardwood and Atlantic white cedar swamps in the south counties. Mary Hough (1983) identifies specimens from all counties except Morris, Union and Hudson. Subsequent collecting and fieldwork has added Morris County to the list with known populations (USDA Plants Database, 2017).

Trientalis borealis is a member of the Primrose family, Primulaceae. *Trientalis* is a genus with three species, only one of which occurs in North America. It was for this reason formerly referred to by its obsolete name *Trientalis americana*. *Trientalis europea* and *T. latifolia* are the other two members of the genus with distribution in northern Eurasia. Identification of northern star-flower is made by the presence of a whorl of lanceolate leaves attached on a stem usually less than 10 cm tall. The flower is clear white, with 5-6 pointed petals.

Native Americans used star-flower for at least two uses. Moerman (1998) recorded the Canadian tribe the Montagnais using roots of star-flower as an infusion for "general sickness." Western Native American tribe Cowlitz used the western variety *latifolia* for an eye wash. Paiute tribes also used the plant for similar eye treatments. The Ojibwa used this plant with other species to burn, using the smoke to attract deer.

The northern star-flower is in flower now, and will be visible until late June. Be sure to keep your eyes ready to identify this plant when botanizing the forests of New Jersey.