

October 2017 Plant of the Month



Monarda punctata L., Spotted Horsemint

October's Plant of the Month is a plant is Horsemint or spotted bee balm. This species is frequent on dry sandy soils throughout the Coastal Plain. It is local in the Pine Barren flora, and according to Stone (1910) may be introduced around home sites. *Monarda fistulosa* is a member of the mint family, and is the only member of the genus that frequents the southern Coastal Counties. Mary Hough's (183) Atlas indicates species do not exist for the Salem and Cumberland Counties, yet my personal observations just this season indicates they are present in both counties.

Horse mint is a curious *Monarda*. Our other species, wild bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*) and bee balm (*Monarda didyma*), exist on the Northern Physiographic provinces. These plants prefer moist habitats and their flowers are purple and red. Spotted horsemint is yellow and prefers the drier end of the soil moisture gradient.

Monarda punctata has been used since ancient times as a remedy for fever and as a face wash (Delaware, Moerman, 1998). The plant is also used as a fall flower in wildflower gardens because of its unusual floral arrangement and unique yellow color.

Monarda punctata is visible from August until October, and is in full flower as this month's description is written. Those who want to see this species should look in recovering dry roadside

or open areas without recent disturbances. A stand of the plant is unmistakable and well worth the time for a late season search.

JRA, 10/2017