

April 2018 Plant of the Month



Vaccinium angustifolium Ait., Late Low Bush Blueberry

April's *Plant of the Month* is low bush blueberry, one of New Jersey's Ericaceous shrubs. *Vaccinium angustifolium* is a common, low groundcover on acidic sandy soils throughout the State. Mary Hough (1983) cites records for every county except Atlantic and Cape May. Late low bush blueberry is one of the many common names applied to this widely distributed shrub. Dwarf, Low sweet, Narrow leaf dwarf, or Late sweet blueberry is other names applied to this plant. Low bush is considered an upland shrub. Stone (1910) best describes its NJ distribution as "frequent in Northern Counties and northeast part of the Middle district, less common in the southern part, generally near the edge of the Pine Barrens, but very rarely in that region itself." It is my experience its presence in the Pine Barrens is within the northern woodlands of Burlington, Ocean and Monmouth Counties. The plant is also widely scattered in the Pine Plains.

Vaccinium angustifolium differs from our other common low shrub blueberry, Early Low bush *Vaccinium pallidum*, by the dentition on the leaf edge as well as its growth habit. Late low bush has small narrow, lanceolate leaves up to 2 cm; the leaf margin is finely toothed. The plants habit is a small vertical cane with most growth occurring on a horizontally held stem. Conversely, *Vaccinium pallidum* is an upright stemmed shrub, with leaves that are oval or elliptic. The leaf edges are primarily entire, although widely space teeth may occur near the leaf tip. Additionally, as implied in the two common names, the plants fruit in different periods: early-June to August; Late-August to September.

This plant has been exploited for its fruit and medicinal uses for thousands of years as evidence from archaeological excavation prove. The plant has been used for medicine for a variety of ailments. Today, this low bush blueberry is commercially harvested from wild plants in Maine and the Canadian Maritime provinces.