

## June 2018 Plant of the Month



*Sisyrinchium atlanticum* Bickn. Atlantic or Eastern Blue Eyed Grass

June's *Plant of the Month* is Atlantic blue-eyed grass. The plant's common name "blue-eyed grass" is somewhat confusing because it is not a grass at all, but a member of the Iris family, Iridaceae. Blue eye grass is a diminutive, linear leaved plant without many clear identifiable features that is until it flowers. The flowers are pale blue, with a deep blue central ring. The flower is six parted with sepals and petal alike, supported on an angled pedicles emerging from the leaf-like bract. Our June Plant of the Month is one of five similar species present in New Jersey. The other for species includes *Sisyrinchium angustifolia*, *S. fuscatum*, *S. montanum* and *S. mucronatum*. Telltale identifies include the width of the stem leaves, the presences of "wings" on the stem, the color of the leaf, the presence or absence of a waxy bloom, and the disposition of the peduncle and spathe. Our plant has narrow, light blue colored leaves. The flowers are peduncles originate from the axils of leaf like bracts.

Atlantic blue-eyed grass is a perennial species found throughout the eastern United States. It is found in open and partially canopied moist habitats on the Coastal Plain and the Piedmont. It's found scattered as far west as Wisconsin and Texas. Mary Hough (1983) identified 11 New Jersey's counties that support the species. I have personally seen the plant in two additional counties, Cumberland and Mercer, during my days roaming the wild lands of the State. Stone (1910) described the plant in "common swamps and meadows throughout the region, most plentiful in the Pine Barrens."

Atlantic blue eyed grass was once used by Native Americans for gastrointestinal aid, and as a gynecological aid decoction, to expel afterbirth. June's Plant of the Month is in full bloom now, and will be so for another few weeks. Those venturing into our meadows and fields should keep aware of this native iris. It may be small, but its beautiful flower is well worth the search.