

## December 2018 Plant of the Month



*Xyris torta* Sm., Slender Yelloweyed Grass

December's Plant of the Month is a monocot defined by flower petal color. Slender yelloweyed grass is a perennial herbaceous species in the monotypic family Xyridaceae. The yelloweyed grasses, according to Wikipedia, are found worldwide with approximately 250 species centered on South America, and specifically Guiana. New Jersey's flora includes at least eight species with the addition of Bob Moyer's fantastic 2007 discovery of *Xyris chapmanii/scabrifolia*. Mary Hough (1983) shows slender yelloweyed grass on the Coastal Plain counties except Salem and Cumberland. Her work also found specimens collected in Bergen, Morris, Mercer and Middlesex Counties.

The Flora of North America (Kral, Vol. 22) describes *Xyris torta* as the most wide-spread xyrid in North America, and it is the species with the widest ecological distribution. This plant is also the type species for the genus. One character that binds *Xyris* is the slender stems terminating in a single flower head. *Xyris torta* differs from most similar New Jersey species by its bulbous base (*X. bulbosa* is a synonym) and ciliate subtending bracts. *Xyris torta* flowers mid to late summer.

*Xyris torta* and other members of the genus were used by Native Americans, specifically the southern Nations, as a drug for pulmonary ailments. There are no modern uses but its small size and yellow flowers make it an interesting plant to find. It is too late to see the plant in flower, but there is no time like the present to put this plant on your plant radar and search for *Xyris torta* next summer.

JRA, 12/2018