

January 2019 Plant of the Month



Eleocharis robbinsii Oakes, Robbin's Spike-rush

January 2019 brings another edition of the **Plant of the Month**. This year, we will start off with a wide spread monocot, *Eleocharis robbinsii*. Robbin's spike-rush is a non-descriptive sedge. As a member of the genus *Eleocharis*, within the large family Cyperaceae, it is separated from other monocots by flowering structures, the production of achenes, and a leaf / stem morphology with distinctive "edges." Robbins spike-rush is not tolerant of high nutrient loads, but can be seen in developed landscapes where acidic waters prevail. Mary Hough (1983) found the species throughout the Coastal Plain. It is found in shallow slow moving clear waters. It is common throughout the Pine Barrens, most of the freshwaters of our tidal Atlantic draining rivers, and the Delaware Bayshore streams and ponds. Stone (1910) describes the Pine Barrens streams and ponds where it was frequent and infrequent elsewhere on the Coastal Plain. Chrysler Herbarium specimens show the plant was once found in Sussex and Bergen Counties.

Robbin's spike rush differs from other spike rushes by its narrow spike, with few spikelet's tucked tight to the stem rachis. The main stem is clearly triangular. It always grows in large stands with stiff Kelly green stems protruding from shallow water, as shown in this month's photo.

Most members of the genus *Eleocharis* had few herbal uses by Native Americans. Records show many spike rushes were collected for the stems woven into baskets and mats. Dense stands of Robbin's spike rush would probably have been favored due to its abundance, thus reducing collection and processing that consumed much of early Americans daily time.