

September 2019 Plant of the Month



Sagittaria latifolia Willd., Duck-Potato, Broad-Leaf Arrowhead

September 2019's **Plant of the Month** is our common arrowhead, *Sagittaria latifolia*. This plant was chosen for the monthly description because it's now in flower, and is visible Statewide for our botanical enthusiasts. This plant is widespread. USDA Plants Database (2019) maps the plants distribution in every State with the exception of Nevada. Broadleaf arrowhead grows in all 21 New Jersey counties (Hough, 1983). The plant is a monocot, and is a member of the Water Plantain family, Alismataceae. Many of the members of this family are aquatic plants, and our Plant of the Month is no exception. It is described as an obligate wetland plant by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and is an indicator of emergent wetland habitats. New Jersey's plants are found in freshwater tidal marshes, sluggish stream edges (photos; Medford, Burlington Co.), and in shallow water of our ponds and lakes.

New Jersey is home to at least nine species of *Sagittaria*. Two of these arrowheads have similarities to our Plant of the Month. These are Englemann's arrowhead, *Sagittaria englemanniana*, and Southern or long-beaked arrowhead, *S. australis*. The genus is quite variable in leaf form and other vegetative characteristics. This plasticity is tempered by distinctive flower and fruit characteristics that help separate otherwise similar plants. Englemann's and southern arrowheads have leaf and achene differences from the Plant of the Month. Englemann's arrowhead has a predominance of exceptionally narrow leaves with a keeled, erect beaked achene. Southern or long beaked arrowhead has slightly broader leaves, and boat shaped flower bracts. Its achene surface is smooth, and the beak is erect. The broad leaf arrowhead has leaves that are intermediate of the former species. It has smaller, narrow flower bracts, and the beak of the smooth achene is transverse, or horizontal.

Native Americans tribes across the continent recognized the utility of arrowhead (Moerman, 1998). It was used as a medicine, but it is noteworthy for its use as a food. The tubers are starchy and have a potato like character in form, texture, and flavor. They are good when roasted or boiled, and they have been part of the Native American food stock for thousands of years. Anyone interested in this plant need only go to your nearest freshwater marsh, and search the terrain for the characteristic broad leaves, and its distinctive spire of white petal flowers.