

January 2020 Plant of the Month



Baccharis halimifolia L., Groundsel-Bush, Sea Myrtle, or Eastern Baccharis

January 2020 brings the end of another decade, and the next edition of the **Plant of the Month**. 2020's Plant of the Month begins with a woody Composite, *Baccharis halimifolia*. Groundsel shrubs are one of two New Jersey Aster family species that have weak woody trunks and stems. *Baccharis* and its aptly named relative the high tide shrub, *Iva frutescens*, are the only woody members of the family in the State, and are often found growing in close proximity. Mary Hough (1983) found the species throughout the Coastal Plain, especially on the salt marsh, or along highways where excessive de-icing creates a salty residue. Its most common habitat is in the estuarine tidal to non-tidal ecotone. The shrub is found growing above the high tide intermixed with common reed grass, poison ivy and seas side goldenrod. It also follows catastrophic Pine Barrens fires where seedlings establish on the open terrain denuded by high temperatures. Stone (1910) describes the shrub as conspicuous especially in late summer when the seeds ripen into a silvery white from the long pappus.

Groundsel bush is an Aster family member, but its flowers are not showy. They lack ray flowers, and are inconspicuous until the pappus matures. This mature pappus is the species mode of dispersal, allowing the plant to be carried by the wind.

Moerman's extensive Native American Ethnobotany (1998) does not cite any use for the eastern species of the genus. Western tribes, specifically the Coastal Californians, used their species for a variety of medicinal and utilitarian uses. Recent work in New Jersey indicates the eastern shrub was probably used as incidental twigs and kindling to fuel small fires to cook shellfish.