

April 2020 Plant of the Month



Juniperus virginiana L. Eastern Red Cedar

April 2020 brings uncertainty and isolation to our botanical community caused by the World-wide pandemic of the Covid-19 coronavirus now circulating in the Northern Hemisphere. Our governor issued a 'stay at home' order, and this limit on movement will test the will of our botanical friends. The Flora of New Jersey selected a statewide tree, the Eastern red cedar, as an example of a plant all New Jersey residents should be able to see while driving on our limited outings. Eastern red cedar is a widespread species with multiple varieties. The species can be found in most dry habitats, but is best represented on calcareous soils. It grows from the edge of the prairies east to the Atlantic Ocean, from the southern edge of the Northern Hardwood forests south to the Gulf Coast. New Jersey's distribution is statewide. Every county has representative specimens, and Mary Hough (1983) accurately describes its limited habitat within the Pine Barrens where it is commonly associated with abandoned farms and homesteads.

Eastern red cedar is not the only native New Jersey Juniper. Eastern red cedar is our most common representative of the genus, but *Juniperus communis* L., common juniper, also calls our State home. Field indicators are based on leaf orientation and shape. Red cedar has two types of leaves: opposite scale-like leaves that when mature have a smooth touch, or subulate, pointed. Common juniper has leaves in whorls of three that are subulate pointed and bristles like. Red cedar can be found in every county whereas common juniper has recent records from Sussex, Warren, Hunterdon, and Morris counties, with historic collections from Bergen, Mercer, and Cape May counties. Eastern red cedar could be confused with another New Jersey tree with the name "cedar." Atlantic white cedar (*Chamaecyparis thyoides*, OBL) is another evergreen conifer that shares the name cedar. Habitat for the white cedar is acidic wetlands whereas red cedar prefers calcareous dry uplands. Additionally, the reproduction structures differ. Red cedar produces a blue fleshy berry, and white cedar produces a small dry scaled cone.

Red cedar has been used by Native Americans since the dawn of time. Its wood has been used for fuel, shelter, medicine and food. Its presence across the Eastern part of North America provided opportunities to all tribes, and each has an ethnological tie to this tree.

Soon the spring will warm, and our favorite plants will rebound from their deep winter's sleep. While waiting to this botanical bounty, keep your eyes peeled for the omnipresent Eastern Red Cedar, something you can see and identify all year long.

JRA, 4/2020