

May 2020 Plant of the Month



Fragaria virginiana Duchesne, Virginia Strawberry

May 2020's *Plant of the Month* is our common Virginian Strawberry, *Fragaria virginiana*. The familiar little plant is a member of the Rose family, Rosaceae. Mary Hough (1983) listed the plant from every county with the exception of the urban Union and Hudson Counties as well as the rural Cumberland and Salem Counties. This may reflect the lack of herbarium specimens, not the absence of the plant within the excluded counties. I can personally verify by direct observation in recent years the presence of *Fragaria* in Salem and Cumberland Counties. I would assume the same could be done for the northern counties as well.

The *Plant of the Month* is our only native member of the genus *Fragaria* in New Jersey. This little plant grows in open areas such old fields and road sides. It produces small flavorful fruit that has spurred botanical cross breeding, innovation and commerce to create the modern strawberry farming we witness today. And, our very own Rutgers University-Cook College was central to this breeding research. Today, when we buy a quart of strawberries from our local super market, it is important to know our native plant was instrumental to the development of this popular fruit.

Strawberry was used by every human population that discovered its tasty fruit. Moerman (1998) describes 28 modern tribes that have modern use and oral histories on the use of strawberry for food and medicine. It is a sure bet this use has its roots in the Paleolithic time when our ancestors first came upon a small red, sweet berry being eating by most of the animals they hunted. The plants flower in May, and its fruits are ready for harvest in June. If you are interested in harvesting these fruits, be prepared to elbow out the wood chuck and robin competition!

JRA, 5/2020