

June 2020 Plant of the Month



Salvia lyrata L. Lyre Leaf Sage

June 2020's *Plant of the Month* is one of New Jersey's native perennials, the lyre-leaf sage. *Salvia* is a genus within the mint family, Lamiaceae. The genus has many native herbs and annuals throughout the continent, but the lyre-leaf sage is New Jersey's only native representative. The plant is found on sandy openings and roadsides throughout the Coastal Plain. Mary Hough's *Wild Plants of New Jersey* (1983) describes the species as intrusive into the Pine Barrens, specifically along road edges and old home site.

Lyre-leaf sage has many of the typical mint family characteristics such as square stems and bilabiate flowers. The pale lavender colored flowers appear in May. They form in whorls along a separate flowering stem, opening starting at the bottom, and slowly progressing toward the top. The species name comes from the basal leaves that appear lobed and many express the undulation seen on the musical instrument, the lyre. There are few similar species within our range. One species, *Penstemon hirsutus*, may be confused with this month's species. The flowering time overlaps with the Plant of the Month, and its flowers have similar bilabiate flowers. Differences become apparent on a closer examination. Both have opposite cauline leaves, yet the *Salvia* leaves have winged petioles whereas the *Penstemon* leaves are sessile and clasping the stem. Additionally, the flowers of the Plan of the Month are formed in wholes on a single stem. *Penstemon* flowers are borne on a branched panicle with light lavender flowers with a hint of pink.

Lyre-leaf sage is used occasionally today as a garden flower. Past uses by Native Americans include medical uses as an antidiarrhal, as cough medicine, and as a laxative (Moerman, 1998).