

September 2020 Plant of the Month



Clematis virginiana L.; Virgin's-Bower

Plant of the Month for September is Virgin's bower, a native trailing vine found Statewide outside of the Pine Barrens. *Clematis virginiana* is found on floodplains and gaps in palustrine wetlands. It is often growing intertwined with other native vines such as bull briar. The plant is widely distributed with populations from Quebec to Georgia, and west to Kansas to North Dakota (Fernald, 1950; USDA, 2020). Mary Hough (1983) and USDA Plants Database (2020) show the plant has a voucher specimen from every county with the exception of Atlantic County.

Clematis virginiana is a member of the buttercup family, Ranunculaceae. Virgin's bower is one of three *Clematis* species known in New Jersey. *Clematis occidentalis* v. *occidentalis*, (*syn. verticilatus*), the purple or mountain clematis, is a threatened species (S2) confined to the Highlands and Valley and Ridge Counties. *Clematis terniflora*, sweet autumn Virgin's bower is a non-native Asiatic species that is widespread throughout the Piedmont and Coastal Plain Counties on rich, moist soils near streams and wetlands. The later species is often confused as our September native. Our Plant of the Month is prolific, and may be weedy due to its wide climbing ability.

Mary Hough (1983) cites the leaves may cause contact dermatitis. Moerman (1998) cites a variety of medicinal uses by Native Americans. It was used by the Cherokee and the Iroquois nations alone or in combination with milkweed for back aches, kidney ailments, and gastrointestinal uses. An infusion from leaves and stems or power from roots were the preferred source of the plant's medicinal properties.

The Virgin's bower is in full flower as I write this synopsis. The plant will be visible for most of the month of September and can be separated from its non-native Asiatic cousin by its delicate, thin toothed leaves, and its pale white, nearly scentless flowers. This contrasts with the sweet smelling autumn Virgin's bower, and provides some confidence you are looking at our widespread native.