

November 2020 Plant of the Month



Persicaria maculosa Gray, Spotted Lady's thumb

Plant of the Month for November *Persicaria maculosa*, the spotted lady's thumb. This herb grows statewide and can be observed from late summer and up to the first frost of the year. It is found throughout the United States (USDA Plants Database, 2020). The plant is recorded from all New Jersey counties (Hough, 1983), and is one of the most widespread of the genus.

Spotted lady's thumb belongs to a group of plants known as the smartweeds. These are members of the Polygonaceae, where *Polygonum* is the type genus of the family. *Persicaria* species were all once classified as members of the genus *Polygonum* and some venues continue to use that name. The Flora of New Jersey has adopted the nomenclature of the Flora of North America, using the new nomenclature provided for this variable set of names for our common herbs. Our species of the month was formerly called *Polygonum persicaria* L. and is listed in most of our regional manuals under this name.

Smartweeds are well represented in New Jersey's flora. New Jersey supports at least 28 species, and this number is subject to the taxonomy and nomenclature revisions of the group. Our current suite of plants includes natives as well as introduced species. Spotted lady's thumb is an introduced species that is well establish within the state. It can be found in moist to wet soils such as disturbed roadsides, farm field edges, and along the edges of railroads, as is shown in the photos for this plant.

Mary Hough (1983) describes using spotted lady's thumb as a "durable" yellow dye. Moerman (1998) indicates many members of the species were used as food, medicine, and other uses. Our Plant of the Month is an introduced species that was used by eastern and mid western tribes for gastrointestinal and analgesic medicine.

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