

## December 2020 Plant of the Month



*Trifolium pratense* L., Red Clover

December's *Plant of the Month* is a well known herb, the red clover, *Trifolium pratense*. This is a non-native perennial that grows statewide. It is found throughout the United States (USDA Plants Database, 2020). The plant has a recorded voucher herbarium specimen from all New Jersey counties with the exception of Gloucester and Salem (Hough, 1983). The plant is native to Europe, Western Asia, and Northern Africa. Today, red clover is spread throughout State in pastures, hay fields, old fields, roadsides and other open habitats. Red clover is an upland plant, and does not tolerate persistent saturation, limiting the species to drier landscape positions.

The genus *Trifolium* in New Jersey is wholly non-native and all current New Jersey species of the genus are introduced. Hough (1983) cites the presence of a Western prairie native, the buffalo clover, *Trifolium reflexum* v. *glabrum*, as introduced, and from all recent botanical records, now extirpated. All the species that are present today have similar habitat requirements, and all are upland pasture species. The group includes perennial species such our Plant of the Month, as well as a suite of annual species. Our plant of the month flowers with a deep pink color. A similar pink species is the zig zag clover (*Trifolium medium*). This plant has historic records for central New Jersey, but no other status on its presence is available today. Other clovers are very light pink (*T. arvense*), white (*T. repens*), white and pink (*T. hybridum*; April 2015 GTP), crimson (*T. incarnatum*, June 2020 GTP), and yellow (*T. agrarium*, *T. procumbens*)

The use of red clover is ancient and prehistoric in its native range. It is a common pasture plant throughout the temperate world, and is common forage for live stock. Its leaves and all parts of the plant are edible. A sweet tea is made from the dried flowers, and many medicinal uses are attributed to the various plant parts. The flowers have long died back, but the basal leaves of this species are visible throughout the year. So as the winter approaches, maybe a glance at the dormant plants along the roadside will yield a little three leaflet view of our Plant of the Month.