

January 2021 Plant of the Month



Nuphar lutea (L.) Sm. ssp *variegata* (Durand) E.O. Beal, Yellow pond-lily or spatterdock

The new year begins with a hint of the warmer months. The January *Plant of the Month* is a our native yellow pond lily or yellow spatterdock. *Nuphar lutea* encompasses all of our native pond-lily species. The Plant of the Month is the subspecies *variegata*. Once named *Nuphar variegata*, it now is within the greater species *N. lutea*, but listed as a separate sub-specific genetic lineage. Our POM is found in acidic ponds and lakes throughout the State. It is most common in the northern counties and throughout the Pine Barrens. Stone (1910) described the species as scarce on the Inner Coastal Plain. Mary Hough (1983) maps the species for all counties with the exception of Hunterdon, Somerset and the Hudson River counties. Cumberland County is mapped without a documented voucher specimen, yet the plant is well established in the streams and lakes along the Delaware Bay.

New Jersey is home to four types of *Nuphar lutea*: subspecies *advena*, *pumila*, *rubrodisca*, and *variegata*. *Nuphar lutea* ssp *advena* is the tall, upright form common to the tidal marshes bordering the Delaware River. *Nuphar lutea* ssp *pumila* (small leaf) and *rubrodisca* (red disc) are rare species, and their distribution in New Jersey is poorly defined. Our Plant of the Month, *N. lutea* ssp *variegata* is differentiated from *N. lutea* ssp *advena* by its floating leaf and preference for non-tidal, acidic ponds, lakes, and streams.

Spatterdock is known to be used by Native Americans as medicine and food. Algonquin uses include a dermatological aid, disinfectant, and as an analgesic (Moerman, 1998). Its use as a food includes the collection of petals and tubers. The tubers were known to provide a ground or pulverized meal used to thicken soups, and eaten with meats.

Nuphar lutea is nowhere to be seen in January. It is asleep within dormant tubers embedded in lake sediments. But the plant will be visible once again in late spring and early summer when rising water temperatures awaken the tubers to produce their characteristic leaves and flowers once more.