

February 2021 Plant of the Month



Lathyrus latifolius L., Perennial Sweet Pea

The January *Plant of the Month* is a member of the Pea family. Perennial pea, or sweet pea, *Lathyrus latifolius* is a native of Europe that has found a home on roadsides and waste areas throughout the eastern United States. Perennial pea is found scattered statewide in New Jersey (Hough, 1983). It is a species that does not tolerate flooding, and is listed as an upland species.

New Jersey is home to seven species of *Lathyrus*. Three species are introduced (*L. latifolius*, *L. pratensis*, and *L. tuberosa*), whereas four are native members of the genus (*L. japonicus*, *L. orhroleucus*, *L. palustris*, and *L. venosus*). The Plant of the Month differs from these other species by its winged stem, the leaflet composed of two blades, and the intense pink color. The other species include plants with cream or yellow flowers, or variations on the stem and leaf configuration.

Lathyrus is a perennial. It is not visible until the start of the growing season, and it does not flower until mid-summer, so we are at a disadvantage to view it in its natural habitat until the summer. Moerrman (1998) does not list uses for our Plant of the Month, but does indicate the various species found throughout the continent have provided food, medicine and fibers for Native American daily activities.

JRA, 2/2021