

March 2021 Plant of the Month



Diodia virginiana L., Virginia Buttonweed

The March *Plant of the Month* is a perennial native member of the Madder family, Rubiaceae, that has been expanding beyond its former range. Virginia buttonweed was once known from a single Cape May Point population. It was listed by the New Jersey Natural Heritage Program as an endangered plant (S1), but the species has expanded into new terrain changing its classification from endangered S1 to threatened S2. Mary Hough (1983) mapped Cape May and Camden counties as its original known limits of distribution. The Camden site was historic, and the Cape May site was the only New Jersey presence for a generation. USDA Plants Database maps Middlesex as an added find subsequent to Hough's 1983 publication. Discoveries I made within the last 15 years in Ocean, Burlington, and Salem counties expanded the plant well beyond the original Cape May Point colony. A diligent search would probably find the plant is present in all counties south of the Raritan River. Today, the plant is infrequent, yet when present it often grows in dense mats. It can be found in wet lawns, road side ditches, and wet farm fields.

New Jersey supports two *Diodia* species. The January 2016 *Guess that Plant* identified our second species, *Diodia teres*. The two species have a similar low creeping stems and opposite leaves, but the similarity ends there. *Diodia teres* is spread Statewide as an upland annual with hairy stems and light blue flowers. *Diodia virginiana* in contrast is a southern, glabrous, wetland perennial with hairy white petals.

Virginia buttonweed has no listed uses. It is known in the Southeast United States as a weed for its ability to spread into lawns. The plant's large fruiting capsule would be attractive to native gatherers and waterfowl alike. Our *Plant of the Month* flowers in July and August.