

June 2021 Plant of the Month



Plantago virginica L., Virginia or Pale-seeded Plantain

The June *Plant of the Month* is another record of a common native herb widely distributed in New Jersey. *Plantago virginica* or the Virginia plantain is a herbaceous annual or biennial classified within the Plantaginaceae or the Plantain family. The species is widely distributed the east and central United States. It is found from Connecticut south through the Mid-Atlantic and Southern Coastal Plain into Texas. Mary Hough (1983) documented the species throughout New Jersey.

Our *Plant of the Month* flowers from early May into June, but the flowers are not needed to separate this plant from its smooth leaved relatives. Virginia plantain is the only broad leaf plantain with distinctly hairy basal leaves. *Plantago virginica* is one of New Jersey's three common broad leaf species. It differs from its two broad leaf relatives, *Plantago major* and *Plantago rugelli*, by its hoary-pubescent basal leaves and pubescent flower scapes. Other New Jersey plantains have leaves that are narrow or linear. The narrow leaf plantains include *Plantago lanceolata*, *P. aristida*, *P. maritima*, *P. pusilla*, and *P. psyllium*.

Virginia plantain is a native species, and it is often associated with the human altered landscapes such as dry farm fields, and roadsides. Merman (1998) lists its use as ceremonial, although other species have medicinal or food uses, and it is probable that these early uses and traditions have been lost. Our *Plant of the Month* will be visible in one form or another until September. Be sure to watch for this species when botanizing dry fields and roadsides.

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