

## January 2022 Plant of the Month



*Gentiana autumnalis* L.; Pine Barren Gentian

The new year begins with Flora's January *Plant of the Month*. To start the year we introduce one of New Jersey's most showy native wildflowers. Our monthly species is a native perennial known as the Pine Barren gentian. This plant is in the family Gentianaceae, the gentian family. Pine Barren gentian is a rare (S3) plant that occupies open damp sandy old fields, roadsides, bog edges in the most remote parts of the Pine Barrens (Stone, 1910). Mary Hough (1983) and the USDA Plants Database identify the plant is confined to the southeastern counties of Monmouth, Ocean, Burlington, Camden, Atlantic and Cape May.

Pine Barren gentian is one of New Jersey's eight gentian species, and the only species restricted to the Pine Barren. The plant's open blue flower occur on slender stems and peduncles. The blue corolla petals expand revealing a streaked and dotted inner corolla throat. This makes this species one of the state's most beautiful flowers.

There are no known uses for Pine Barren gentian. Moerman (1998) cites an array of medicinal uses, such as tonics and infusions, for our closed gentian species *Gentiana andersewii* and *G. saponaria*. One could assume a similar use was made of the Pine Barren species.

January is way too late to see our monthly plant. It flowers in August through October. Its leaves will not be identifiable by next July. We'll have to wait until next summer to enjoy this beautiful native perennial herb.