

April 2022 Plant of the Month



Houstonia caerulea L., Common or Azure Bluet; Innocence; Quaker Ladies

April's *Plant of the Month* is a diminutive native spring ephemeral that I have not seen in southern New Jersey for many years. It is a common spring occurrence throughout the northern counties, yet it has been elusive in the southern counties, specifically the Inner Coastal Plain habitats along the Delaware River. A small colony was spotted this spring in a poorly maintained lawn, providing a glimpse of this tiny native perennial member of the Madder family, the Rubiaceae. Mary Hough (1983) cites the plant as frequent in all New Jersey counties with the exception of Camden, Atlantic, and Cape May. The USDA Plants Database shows the species present in Camden, but absent from Gloucester. The photos above were taken in Logan Township, Gloucester County, providing documentation it is present in Gloucester.

The common bluet is one of two species described for New Jersey. The second species, *Houstonia longifolia*. That species has a single occurrence documented by a single 1877 collection from Ocean County. Our Plant of the Month has a basal rosette of spatulate shaped leaves, with a cauline stem that supports a single 4-petaled, pale blue violet flower. Our plant is visible in early spring, March to April.