

June 2022 Plant of the Month



Ranunculus bulbosus L., Bulbous buttercup, St. Anthony's Turnip

June's *Plant of the Month* is another vibrantly colored member of the Buttercup family, only this species is not native. June's plant is bulbous buttercup, a perennial buttercup that is native to Western Europe. New Jersey's population is found State-wide and it was introduced long ago. As is often the case with plants requiring rich soil, this bulbous buttercup is absent the Pine Barrens. Our Plant of the Month grows on open road sides, hayfields, meadows, pastures and lawns where it favors the well drained soils. The plant has a FAC wetland status.

The bulbous buttercup is a perennial that over winters as a bulb-like expansion at the base of the stalk. The plant flowers in May though early summer. It is at this time the vibrant yellow flowers provide an impressive display wherever the plant grows. I recently drove through rural Gloucester and Salem Counties where most unplowed fields were dazzling displays with fields of yellow. New Jersey is home to more than 20 species of buttercups that occupy a diverse set of habitats from the mountains to the shore, but curiously absent the Pine Barrens. Most species have yellow petals, and though some are white or apetalous.

Buttercup is poisonous to livestock when eaten fresh. The plant, as most buttercups, produces a glycoside *ranunculin* that disrupts one of the cellular biochemical cycles. This is why we often see horses grazing around patches of buttercups as well as a suite of other unpalatable plants. Native Americans were quick to seize upon its use soon after introduction. Moerman (1998) cites its use by the Iroquois as a drug remedy for tooth ache and venereal disease. Local folklore said you enjoyed butter if the flower held to your ear showed yellow, as of course it always did! Bulbous buttercup is in flower now. Look for fields of yellow wherever you travel, right now its most likely our Plant of the Month.

JRA, 6/2022