

November 2022 Plant of the Month



Cirsium horridulum Michx., Yellow Thistle

The November *Plant of the Month* is the native, biennial herb named yellow thistle, *Cirsium horridulum*. This species, as was October's species, is a composite and member of the Asteraceae. The plant is a native to the Atlantic Coastal Plain, and becomes more frequent on the edge marshes in northeast North America. New Jersey's distribution is more frequent in the southern Coastal Plain counties, and is often associated with marshes. Hough (1983) identifies its presence state-wide, with vouchers collected from the Coastal Plain and Delaware Bay-shore counties. Witmer Stone (1910, listed in genus *Cardus*) called it frequent in open swamps of the Middle District, and along the edges of coastal marshes south to Cape May. The photo above is from a coastal dune setting in Strathmere, Cape May County.

Yellow thistle is one of eight species found in New Jersey (*Cirsium altissimum*, *arvense*, *discolor*, *horridulum*, *muticum*, *pumilum*, *virginianum*, *vulgare*). Only two species, *Cirsium arvense* and *vulgare*, are not native to North America. Each of the other six species have a native distribution within the State. Our *Plant of the Month's* yellow flower is an instant identification feature. Each of the other species form blue or violet ray flowers. Our species leaves are woolly on the underside. The specific name implies a somewhat bristly leaf plant, and it is indeed covered with bristles.

Native Americans used thistle for food and medicine. The soft, starchy spongy interior was eaten uncooked, and the plant was used as a dermatological aid and expectorant. Our plant is beyond flowering at this time, but the leaves for next season's crop can still be seen on road edges and the upper limits of swamps and marshes.

JRA, 11/2022