

January 2023 Plant of the Month



Arctostaphylos uva-ursi (L.) Spreng., Bearberry, Kinnikinick

The January *Plant of the Month* is a native shrub and relict of the last ice age. Bearberry or kinnikinick, the Native American name, is an evergreen, low growing member of the blueberry family, the Ericaceae. The plant is found throughout the northern hemisphere, and is found on dry sandy soils and ridge tops. New Jersey's specimens are common in the center Pine Barrens and local in the northern counties (Hough, 1983). The photo above is credited to our late founding FNJP member, Bill Olson.

Bearberry is the only member of the genus in New Jersey. At least two other creeping species (*Arctostaphylos rubra*, *A. alpina*) exist in extreme conditions along the northern and alpine fringes of the continent. Members of the genus also bare the name Manzanita in the western part of the continent. Bearberry is distinguished from other low growing shrubs by its trailing habit, evergreen leaves, and red berries. Our Plant of the Month flowers in April and May, with fruits born from August to September.

Bearberry, along with a suite of northern species such as *Corema conradii* and *Hudsonia ericoides* represent a colder period of time when New Jersey was in the grips of an ice age. Apparently the climate and geology are favorable for these species to persist thousands of years after the affect of the ice age have vanished. Native Americans and early colonial American relied on bearberry for food and dyes. Its widespread use among the Native tribes for a variety of uses indicates its importance. Today, it is used as a groundcover in Native landscape plantings.

JRA, 1/2023