

April 2024 Plant of the Month



Centaurea jacea L., Brown knapweed

April's *Plant of the Month* is a non-native species often found on roadsides. Brown knapweed is a member of the Composite or Daisy family, Asteraceae. It is one of two common species of *Centaurea* found on the dry roadsides in New Jersey. Hough (1983) cites a infrequent distribution with concentrations in the eastern Pine Barrens as well as in the Northwest counties.

As its name suggests, brown knapweed has brown phyllaries that form the involucre. The flowers are rather showy, with long fringe ray flowers that are either rose to purple. Brown knapweed is a relative of the common spotted knapweed, *Centaurea stoebe* (formerly *C. maculosa*, *C. biebersteinii*). Spotted knapweed differs from the *Plant of the Month* by its light pink to lavender flowers, smaller heads, and a dark spot on the upper edge of the phyllaries.

The cultural uses of these non-native composite herbs are restricted to known medicinal uses from the Europe. The *Plant of the Month* is a relatively new introduction to New Jersey, and Native Americans did not have the opportunity to use this plant in their list of pharmacological plants. Brown knapweed flowers from mid-Summer until the first frost in Autumn. It can be seen with some regularity in Southern Ocean County on the dry roadside where it escapes roadside mowing and maintenance.

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