

# False Lettuce



*Lactuca floridana* plants



Photo credits: David Smith

**Scientific Name** *Lactuca floridana*  
(L.) Gaertn.

**Family Name** Asteraceae  
Aster Family

## Did you know?

This species and the common tall blue lettuce, *Lactuca biennis*, are the only species of wild lettuce with fruit hairs (pappus) in double rings. *Lactuca* means milk in Latin and refers to the milky sap of this genus (Fernald 1950).

## Summary

**Protection** Endangered in New York State, not listed federally.

This level of state protection means: listed species are those with: 1) 5 or fewer extant sites, or 2) fewer than 1,000 individuals, or 3) restricted to fewer than 4 U.S.G.S. 7 ½ minute topographical maps, or 4) species listed as endangered by U.S. Department of Interior.

**Rarity** G5, S1

A global rarity rank of G5 means: This species is demonstrably secure globally, though it may be quite rare in parts of its range, especially at the periphery.

A state rarity rank of S1 means: This plant is endangered/critically imperiled in New York because of extreme rarity (typically 5 or fewer populations or very few remaining individuals) or is extremely vulnerable to extirpation from New York due to biological factors.

## Conservation Status in New York

There is only one existing population with less than 50 plants. There are records from 1851 and 1924 that remain to be checked to see if they still exist.

### Short-term Trends

More survey work is needed to understand short-term trends.

### Long-term Trends

This plant has always been very rare in New York and continues to exist at low levels.

# Conservation and Management

## Threats

One population is near a path and may be threatened by improper path management or direct trampling.

## Conservation Strategies and Management Practices

Plant should be monitored occasionally to see if they are being directly affected by park visitation.

## Research Needs

Herbarium work is needed to determine if all specimens are correctly identified. Propagation work should be done to see if the present population could be augmented. We would also like to know what limits its growth in New York.

# Habitat

The plants occur in oak-hickory forest on rich, moist soil. A historical specimen was from hilly, rich woods (New York Natural Heritage Program 2012). Rich woods, thickets and openings (Fernald 1970). Thickets, woods, and moist, open places (Gleason & Cronquist 1991).

## Associated Ecological Communities

### Appalachian Oak-hickory Forest

A hardwood forest that occurs on well-drained sites, usually on ridgetops, upper slopes, or south- and west-facing slopes. The soils are usually loams or sandy loams. This is a broadly defined forest community with several regional and edaphic variants. The dominant trees include red oak, white oak, and/or black oak. Mixed with the oaks, usually at lower densities, are pignut, shagbark, and/or sweet pignut hickory.

## Associated Species

Bitternut Hickory (*Carya cordiformis*)  
Pignut Hickory (*Carya glabra*)  
White Wood-aster (*Eurybia divaricata*)  
White Ash (*Fraxinus americana*)  
Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*)  
Large False Solomon's-seal (*Maianthemum racemosum*)  
*Parthenocissus quinquefolius*  
Jumpseed (*Persicaria virginiana*)  
Wild Black Cherry (*Prunus serotina*)  
Rambler Rose (*Rosa multiflora*)  
Rough-leaf Goldenrod (*Solidago rugosa*)

## Identification Comments

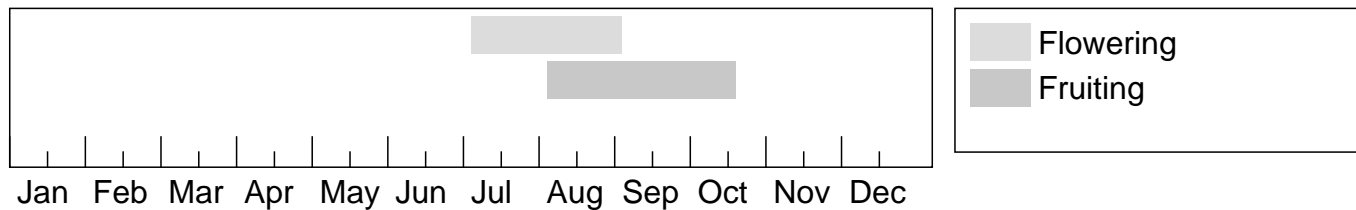
This plant is a tall annual or perennial wildflower that grows up to 2 meters tall. The leaf blades only have hairs along the main veins beneath and they vary from elliptic with a few teeth to very lobed or even these few leaflets at the base. The 11-17 (sometimes up to 25) flowers are bluish, or white in a large open inflorescence. The pappus is bright white. The achenes are 4-6 mm long, gray-black and mottled and several-nerved on each face.. The outer fruits are often distinctly thick-beaked, the inner are beakless.

## Best Life Stage for Identifying This Species

The best time to identify this species is when it is in fruit.

## The Best Time to See

The plants flower in July and August and mature fruits develop August through mid-October.



**The time of year you would expect to find False Lettuce in New York.**

## Similar Species

*Lactuca biennis* has a light brown pappus and elongate, narrowly paniculiform inflorescence.

## Taxonomy

Kingdom Plantae

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**Phylum** Anthophyta  
└─ **Class** Dicots (Dicotyledoneae)  
    └─ **Order** Asterales  
        └─ **Family** Asteraceae (Aster Family)

## Synonyms

*Lactuca floridana* var. *villosa* ((Jacq.) Cronq.)

# Additional Resources

## Links

### Nearctica - Eastern Wildflowers

<http://www.nearctica.com/flowers/composit/lactuca/Lflorid.htm>

### USDA Plants Database

<http://plants.usda.gov/java/nameSearch?mode=sciname&keywordquery=LACTUCA+FLORIDANA>

### NatureServe Explorer

<http://natureserve.org/explorer/servlet/NatureServe?searchName=LACTUCA+FLORIDANA>

### Google Images

<http://images.google.com/images?q=LACTUCA+FLORIDANA>

### Delaware Wildflowers

<http://www.delawarewildflowers.org/plant.php?id=1106>

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**New York Natural Heritage Program**

625 Broadway, 5th Floor,  
Albany, NY 12233-4757  
Phone: (518) 402-8935  
[acris@nynhp.org](mailto:acris@nynhp.org)

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This guide was authored by Stephen M. Young