



TREES AND PLANTS

SHALE-BARREN ROCKCRESS

ABOUT

The Shale-barren Rockcress (*Arabis Serotina*) is a member of the Mustard family. It is an erect flowering biennial (flowering every two years) adapted to dry conditions and most frequently found on eroding southern facing slopes. Because it is a biennial, it has two age stages: non-reproductive and reproductive. As a young plant, it has leaves in the shape of a rosette around its base. In its reproductive stage, the leaves at the bottom of the plant shrivel and the flowering stem produces 3 to 41 branches with small flowers of white or creamy petals that are produced from June to September. They die at the first killing frost. Mature plants reach a height of 16 to 40 inches. This plant needs to be pollinated, thereby reproducing sexually, and the primary pollinators include bees and syrphid (wasp-like) flies. Groupings of the Shale-barren Rockcress are small and generally number less than 20 individuals – although their number has been noticed to fluctuate considerably.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Shale-barren Rockcress is an endangered species and can only be found in West Virginia and Virginia on mid-Appalachian shale barrens of the Ridge and Valley Province of the Appalachian Mountains. These shale barrens are characterized by an open, scrubby growth of pine, oak, red cedar, and other woody species that like dry conditions. This plant is highly restricted in its habitat and cannot tolerate disturbance of its environment. Threats to this species include destruction of its habitat by construction of roads, railroads, hiking paths, and the damming of a stream totally destroyed one population site. Other dangers to the plant are grazing deer (especially during droughts), encroachment by invasive exotic plants and grass species, and the spraying of insecticides causing a decline in the pollinators. In 2001 there were only 60 populations of this species totaling fewer than 1000 individuals.

For more detailed information visit: www.fws.gov and www.centerforplantconservation.org.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

What does it mean if a plant is biennial?

- a) It flowers every two years
- b) It flowers twice a year
- c) It has two stems
- d) It grows in pairs

Answer is A.

