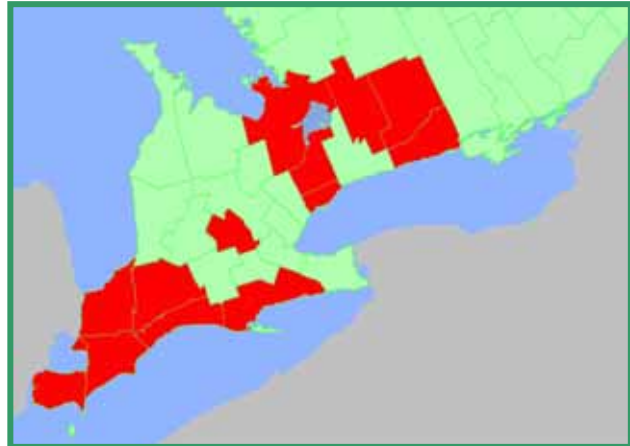
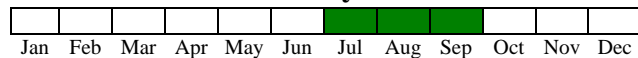


*Pycnanthemum virginianum* (L.) Dur. & Jackson      Virginia Mountain Mint



**Best Survey Period**



**Legal status:** Secure in Ontario, no legal status in Canada.

**Global and provincial rank:** G5/S4

**Other Common names:** Virginia mint, mountain mint, Virginia-thyme, wild basil.

**Family:** Lamiaceae. The mint family.

**Total range:** Quebec to Minnesota south to Virginia, Arkansas and Oklahoma.

**Provincial distribution:** The species is quite widespread throughout suitable habitat in southern Ontario, but only in Essex County is it at all common.

**Recognition:** A strongly, but pleasantly aromatic perennial with stems 60-90 cm tall from a slender

rhizome. The stem usually branches above. Leaves are narrow, lance-shaped, somewhat glossy and smooth, up to 5 cm long with untoothed margins.

Flowers are arranged in a flat-topped to rounded cluster at the top of the stem. Only a few flowers in each cluster are open at a time. Flowers are somewhat asymmetric, with two lips, whitish to pale lavender with purple spots. Showy white bracts surround flowers. Each flower produces four nutlets about 2-3 mm long.

**Habitat:** Dry, mesic and wet prairies and fens, but tolerant of partial shade.

**Biology:** The mint family contains about 3,500 species worldwide. They are well known for their aromatic oils, and many of them are used for scent and flavoring.

The plants produce quantities of nectar and are frequented by many insects.

Reproduction is by seed. Seeds germinate without cold stratification.

**Conservation/management:** Virginia mountain mint is fairly common on Walpole Island throughout several prairies. It responds well to fire and is threatened by natural succession when regular fires are suppressed.

**Comments:** All parts of the plant produce a strong mint-like aroma when crushed. The leaves and flowers are used to flavour meat and broth.

Tea made from the flowers or leaves is used to treat coughs, chills and fever. A decoction of powdered roots and used to treat menstrual disorders, indigestion and colic and to cause abortions. A poultice of the leaves is used in the treatment of headaches.

The leaves are also used to scent mink traps and disguise the smell of humans.

The dried flowers are sometimes used in dried flower arrangements.

The genus name *Pycnanthemum* is taken from the Greek *puknos* and *antheon* meaning “dense flower” in reference to the crowded flower clusters.

**Research needs:** *P. virginianum* is not a priority species for research and monitoring on Walpole Island. It has importance as a medicinal herb but is not threatened at this time. Ecosystem based recovery of prairies and savannas will include this prairie indicator.

**Selected references:**

Foster, S. and Duke, J.A. A Field Guide to Medicinal Plants. Eastern and Central N. America. Houghton Mifflin Co.

University of Michigan, Dearborn. 2003. Native American Ethnobotany. Database at <http://herb.umd.umich.edu>.

**Abstract citation:**

Bowles, J.M. 2004. Special plant abstract for *Pycnanthemum virginianum* (Virginia Mountain Mint) Walpole Island Heritage Centre, ON and Michigan Natural Features Inventory, Lansing, MI. 2 pp.