Wildflowers of the Adirondacks:
Tall Meadow Rue (*Thalictrum pubescens*)

Wildflowers of the Adirondacks: Tall Meadow Rue’s fluffy, white flowers appear mainly in July and early August. Tall Meadow Rue (*Thalictrum pubescens*) on the Jackrabbit Trail at River Road (14 July 2019).

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Tall Meadow Rue (*Thalictrum pubescens*) is a native wetland wildflower that grows in the Adirondack Mountains of upstate New York and produces feathery white flowers from late June through August.

Tall Meadow Rue is a member of the *Ranunculaceae* (Buttercup) family. It is part of the *Thalictrum* (Meadow-rue) genus. This species is one of six members of the *Thalictrum* genus found in the Adirondack Park. The others are:

- Purple Meadow Rue (*Thalictrum dasycarpum*, a nonnative species which has been documented only in Essex County)
- Early Meadow Rue (*Thalictrum dioicum*)
- Skunk Meadow Rue (*Thalictrum revolutum*)
- Rue Anemone (*Thalictrum thalictroides*, which has been documented only in Washington County)
- Veiny Meadow Rue (*Thalictrum venulosum*, which has been documented only in Essex and Clinton counties)

Other non-scientific names for this species include King of the Meadow, King-of-the-Meadow, Tall Meadow-rue, Late Meadow-rue, Meadow-weed, Muskrat-weed, Silver-weed, and Quicksilver-weed.
Identification of Tall Meadow Rue

Tall Meadow Rue, as the name implies, is a tall (2-6 feet high) perennial plant. It grows from rhizomes and has stout stems.

The leaves of Tall Meadow Rue are compound, meaning that they are divided into leaflets.

- The leaflets are about an inch long.
- The leaflets are bluish to olive green and end with two to three shallow lobes.
- The leaflets are glabrous, meaning that they are smooth, lacking hair or bristles.
- The leaves are arranged on the stem in an alternate fashion, meaning that there are two leaves per node. In late summer and early fall, the leaves turn an attractive shade of yellow or pink.

Tall Meadow Rue flowers are arranged in flower clusters (panicles). The individual flowers are white and starry. They are about ½ inch across and have no petals. The white color is from the white filaments of the stamens. These numerous thread-like stamens are erect and give the blossoms a misty quality.

The bloom time for Tall Meadow Rue throughout its range is from mid-June through September. In the Adirondacks, flowering is usually from late June through August. Most iNaturalist observations of flowering Tall Meadow Rue within the Adirondack Park Blue Line are from July through mid-August.

Tall Meadow Rue flowers are followed by fruit, which appears in seed-like rounded clusters. The clusters change from white to purplish, becoming light green, then darker green. As the fruits mature, the ball-shaped head of seeds finally turns brown.

Keys to identifying Tall Meadow Rue and distinguishing it from other species that occur in the Adirondacks include the nature of the flowers and the shape of the leaves. Early Meadow Rue (*Thalictrum dioicum* L.) also has loose clusters of dangling flowers, but it flowers earlier than Tall Meadow Rue; and the yellowish stamens droop, in contrast to the white, erect stamens of Tall Meadow Rue. In addition, the leaflets have four or more lobes at the ends. In any event, Early Meadow Rue usually is found in nonwetlands, such as mesic hardwood forests, while Tall Meadow Rue is a wetland plant normally found in poorly drained soils in swamps and steam or lake edges.

Habitat differences also help distinguish Tall Meadow Rue from two other plants with somewhat similar leaves. Wild Columbine also has compound leaves, with lobed leaflets, but with more lobes than the leaflets of Tall Meadow Rue. Blue Cohosh also has compound leaves with lobed leaflets, but the leaves tend to have a more bluish cast. Both of these plants are generally found in better-drained soil than Tall Meadow Rue; and, in any event, both have very different shaped flowers, so are unlikely to be confused with Tall Meadow Rue when flowering.

Uses of Tall Meadow Rue

Tall Meadow Rue has very limited uses. The Iroquois used an infusion of the plant to treat nosebleeds and an infusion of the roots as a gall medicine. The Montagnais reportedly used the leaves to flavor salmon.

Wildlife Value of Tall Meadow Rue
Wildflowers of the Adirondacks: Tall Meadow Rue has very limited uses for humans. Its chief value for wildlife is for insects. Tall Meadow Rue (Thalictrum pubescens) on the Black Pond Trail at the Paul Smith's College VIC (19 July 2018).

Wildflowers of the Adirondacks: Tall Meadow Rue is often found on the marshy edges of streams. Tall Meadow Rue (Thalictrum pubescens) on the Heart Lake Trail (12 July 2017).

Wildflowers of the Adirondacks: Tall Meadow Rue is chiefly of value to insects. The flowers are said to be constantly visited by bees and butterflies. In addition, a number of beetles reportedly feed on the plant, as do larvae of the Straight-lined Looper. A study of the host plants of butterflies and moths collected in the Adirondack Park found that larvae from several other species of moth used Tall Meadow Rue as a host plant, including the Canadian Owlet, Pink-patched Looper Moth, Hitched Arch, and Speckled Cutworm.

Distribution of Tall Meadow Rue

Tall Meadow Rue is found in most states in the eastern US (with the exception of Florida) and the southeastern Canadian provinces. The plant is listed as threatened in Indiana.

Tall Meadow Rue is found in nearly all counties in New York State. Its presence has been documented by vouchered plant specimens for all counties within the Adirondack Park except Clinton County.

Habitat of Tall Meadow Rue

Throughout its range, Tall Meadow Rue can grow in full sun to deep shade. Its preference is for moist, moderately fertile, organically rich soils in part shade or dappled sun.

Tall Meadow Rue is classified as a Faculative Wetland plant (FACW). This means that it usually occurs in wetlands, but may occur in nonwetlands.

Tall Meadow Rue throughout its range is found in rich fens, swamps, marshes, low thickets, wet meadows, and along the edges of meandering streams and rivers. It can also be found at wet peripheral areas of fens and bogs and along the marshy shorelines of lakes.

In the Adirondack Park, Tall Meadow Rue is found in several wetland ecological communities, including:

- Rich Hemlock-Hardwood Peat Swamp
- Rich Shrub Fen
- Rich Sloping Fen
- Riverside Ice Meadow
- Sedge Meadow
- Shallow Emergent Marsh

Among the trails covered here, Tall Meadow Rue can be found in wetland areas along the Black Pond Trail at the Paul Smith's College VIC, the Jackrabbit Trail at River Road, the Bloomingdale Bog Trail, and the Heart Lake Trail. Look for Tall Meadow Rue growing near Spotted Touch-me-not (Impatiens capensis), Spotted Joe Pye Weed (Eutrochium maculatum), White Turtlehead (Chelone glabra), and Cinnamon Fern (Osmunda cinnamomea).

References


Wildflowers of the Adirondack Park
Forest Succession

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- Shrubs
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WILDLIFE

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PLANTS
Buy Wildflowers of the Adirondacks on Amazon.com ✓ FREE SHIPPING on qualified orders. Wildflowers of the Adirondacks Paperback – February 11, 2020. by Donald J. Leopold (Author), Lytton John Musselman (Author). See all 2 formats and editions Hide other formats and editions. Where to spot wildflowers in the Adirondacks. A reminder that it is currently mud season in the Adirondacks, and there is still snow at higher elevations. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is asking hikers to stay below 2,500 feet to avoid damaging trails and sensitive vegetation during this time. Coon Mountain. The Adirondack Land Trust's Coon Mountain Preserve is the destination when it comes to Spring wildflowers. Botanist Jerry Jenkins describes this area as “more diverse and richer in rare and uncommon species than any other community in the in the Adirondack Park.” Coon Mountain Official Brochure. Paul Smith's VIC. The Paul Smith's Visitor Interpretive Center trails are open year round. Culinary art meets casino nightlife at Wildflowers at Turning Stone, the intimate 65-seat restaurant located just off the lobby of The Lodge at Turning Stone Resort Casino. Our global team of inspectors are anonymous at all times, so they have the same experience as a typical guest. While we inspect both service and facility, our Star Rating system emphasizes service because your experience at a hotel, restaurant or spa goes beyond looks — how it makes you feel is what you will remember most.