



***Smilax rotundifolia* L.**
Greenbrier, common greenbrier

Liliaceae (LilyFamily)

Blooming season: June

Plant:

Climbing vine, sometimes using other greenbrier stems for support.

Can form extensive tangled thickets.

Solid stems(no pith) medium green year-round, growing from rhizome.

Stems and branches have sharp spines, flattened at base, to 1 cm long.

Spines are tri-colored: base is green, tip dark brown, middle section tan.

Spines usually only in inter-nodal areas.

Branches distinctly 4-angled, and zigzag from node to node.



Leaves:

Alternate, deciduous, leathery texture.

Entire, or “obscurely denticulate” (Billington 1943 p. 53).

Ovate to nearly round, dull green on both surfaces.

Size variable: 1.5-15 cm wide by 4-15 cm long.

Petioles have pair of tendrils at base.

Veins prominently parallel to mid-vein, 3 (sometimes 5) meeting at tip.

Flower:

Dioecious, flowering in June in umbels of 6-25.

Both female and male flowers are yellowish or greenish.

Sepals and petals each three.

Fruit:

Berry, 6-8 mm, very dark blue with a waxy bloom.

Seeds, 1-3 per berry, reddish brown.

Ripen October-November.

Can be confused with: *Smilax tamnoides* L. (*S. hispida* Torrey) which has bristly (rather than spiny), round stems.



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2

Geographic range:

Type specimen location:

State: Lake Michigan counties in lower third of state.

Regional: Nova Scotia, extending southwest to Iowa, south to Georgia and Texas.

Habitat:

Local: Upland, path-side with some regular sun. Also found in creek habitat, along the path.

Regional: Dry, often sandy woods and dunes, frequently under oaks.

Common local companions:

Oaks, huckleberry, blueberry, and white pine.

Usages:

Human: Native Americans used it: as an analgesic, especially for rheumatism; dried leaves were used to make a decoction for burns; leaves were also used on boils. Other *Smilax* spp. from Asia and tropical America have been used as a tonic, providing the “sarsaparilla of commerce” (Mabberley 1987, p. 543).

Other animal: *Smilax* stem tangles provide protective cover for rabbits. The fruit and buds are eaten by ruffed grouse, and the fruit by catbirds and mockingbirds.

Why is it called *that*? *Smilax* comes from the Greek name for bindweed. *Rotundifolia*, “round leaf”, describes the leaf. Greenbrier is a term quite descriptive of the plant!

Prepared by: Barbara Lukacs Grob April 2008