**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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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!

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