Prairie Alumroot

Heuchera richardsonii

(Saxifragaceae)

By Lauren Marks,
Restoration Technician

"The tiny seed knew that in order to grow, it needed to be dropped in the dirt, covered in darkness and struggle to reach the light"

-- Sandra King

The restoration crew is actively preparing their contribution for the next growing season by planning the areas to distribute the seeds that we have collected during the last growing season. We are focusing on choosing our spring prescribe burn units and the units that we would like to disperse the seeds that we have collected. Out of all the different species of seeds that our crew collected over this past year, one species in particular stood out, Prairie Alumroot.

Prairie Alumroot is native to the Northwest in North America. It is found occasionally in the Northern two-thirds of Illinois, but it is rare or absent in Southern Illinois. This perennial has leaves that resemble as rose and can grow two to five inches across. The leaves are circular to slightly cordate (heart shaped). On the underside of the leaf, there are straight white hairs that grow along the major veins. The petioles, the stalks that join leaves to stems, are longer than the leaves with straight white hairs that are long and conspicuous (photo left).

Prairie Alumroot can be found in full bloom from May through mid-September and the blooms last for about a month. The flowering stems are two to four feet tall with straight white hairs. (photo above) The flowers are green or cream, but can become a reddish color in sunnier locations. Each flower is about one-eighth of an inch long. The flowers contain a bottle-shaped calyx, a whorl that encloses the petals and forms a protective layer around a flower in bud, which is divided into five lobes. Within the calyx, there are five petals with five stamens with orange anthers that extend beyond the calyx. Small capsules replace the flowers and these capsules contain tiny unwinged seeds that are dispersed by the wind.

This species grows well in light shade to full sun with dry to mesic (moderately moist) conditions. Prairie Alumroot also prefers rocky soil, but it will grow in loam (a soil with roughly equal portions of sand, silt, and clay), clay-loam, or sandy soils. This native species is easy to grow once it has been established and is also drought tolerant. This plant can be found in upland areas of black soil prairies, hill prairies, gravel prairies, sand prairies, limestone glades (an open area within a woodland), and rocky upland woodlands. Chris Bronny, author of Floristic Survey of the Spontaneous Vascular Flora of the Byron Forest Preserve District's Prairie Preserve, found Prairie Alumroot on the Blue Dot Prairie, located on our main site, in 1991.

The restoration staff at Byron Forest Preserve District is managing the areas where Prairie Alumroot is located on our properties to ensure its survival as well as the survival of other native plant species. We are achieving this goal by controlling and removing invasive species, such as White Sweet Clover and Yellow Sweet Clover, to give our native species a chance to thrive and reproduce within our natural areas.