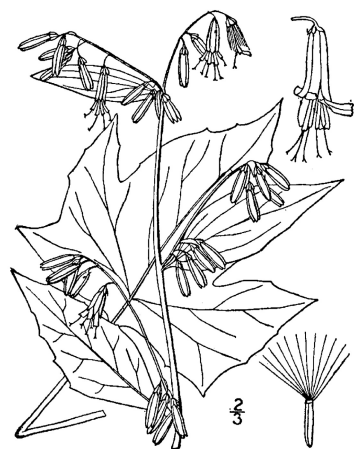
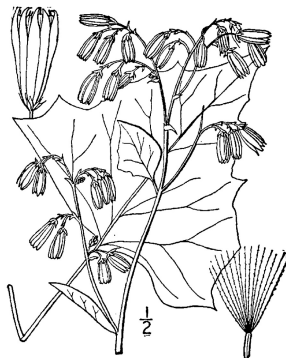


# PURSuing THE PRENANTHES

The genus *Prenanthes* seems to be somewhat under collected and under appreciated in West Virginia. There maybe several reasons for this: most species bloom in August and September when field work is some what limited, the plants can grow to over 6 ft high and parts from all of the plant are needed to document the occurrence because the leaves change as they progress up the stem. Pressing 5 sheets for one plant is not easy to remember to do, nor to do. That said, the genus has merits; all the species are natives, there are no exotic *Prenanthes*, and identification to genus is relatively easy. The genus name is from the Greek *prenes*, drooping, and *anthos*, flower, which well describes the flowers rather like a wild lettuce (and indeed some are called "wild lettuce") but in most species all of the flowers hang down. Please help contribute to our knowledge of this genus by collecting specimens which include heads, florets, and pappus, as well as leaves, then depositing them in herbaria within WV.

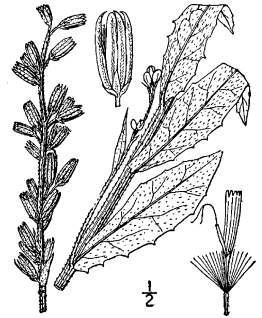
Hybrids have been reported in this genus and there are some unresolved taxonomic problems but that should not deter you from looking for these plants. Most of the keys stress the flowers characteristics, this means that a lens may be very necessary in some cases. Looking at the descriptions of the entire plant is highly recommended in making determinations as it is the combination of characters that is important.

***Prenanthes alba* L.** White lettuce, white rattlesnake root is recorded from 4 current and 11 older records, most in the mountains or the eastern part of the state. It ranges from 1.5 to slightly less than 6 ft tall. The stems are purplish, with large coarse, ovate or deltoid leaves, long thinly winged petioles. The leaves are variable, sometimes even 3 lobed or with hastate bases, the margins are coarsely dentate or serrate. The flower color ranges from whitish to pale pink or lavender through red. Flowering from August to October in sandy soils in open woods, creek banks,.

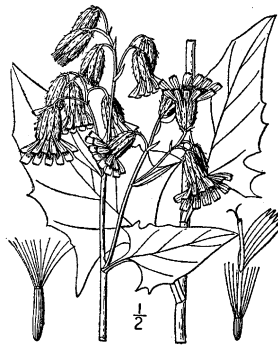


***Prenanthes altissima* L.** Tall White Lettuce. This is one of our most recorded species with 10 current and 27 historic records well distributed throughout the state. Heights range from from 16 inches to about 8.5 ft. The 5-6 flowers are pale yellow to greenish yellow. Bloom season is longer than most species occurring from August through November. Found in disturbed areas, roadsides, open woods or other places with good light.

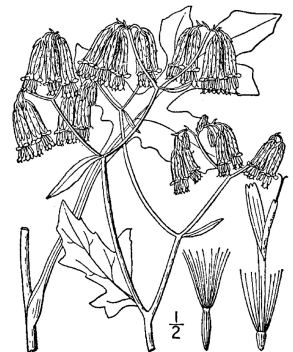
***Prenanthes aspera* Michx.** Tall white lettuce, is only known from one old Mingo County record. At flowering the plant may be between 1.5 and 5.5 feet tall. The leaves are not lobed, and only weakly toothed. In this species the lower basal leaves are withered and/or gone by the time of flowering. This species is the only WV one in which the inflorescences do not droop, instead they are in a crowded spike at the top of the plant. The flowers are a yellowish white to cream color. Flowering in August and September. The habitat is dry, prairies, roadsides and barrens.



***Prenanthes crepidinea* Michx.** Corymbed Rattlesnake Root, is currently known from Brooke County with a historic record from Randolph County. The heritage data base considers it to be threatened but in need of additional field and taxonomic work. At flowering this plant may be between 3 and 7 feet tall, which does make an impression. The leaves are deltate or ovate, gradually reduced upward usually coarsely toothed, with only occasional plants showing lobed leaves. The inflorescences are yellowish white, nodding in an open panicle. Flowering in August and September. The habitat is usually moist, be it upland woods, thickets, or prairies.



***Prenanthes serpentaria* Pursh** Rattlesnake Root, Gall of the Earth, Cankerweed, Lion's Foot. Six current records and 16 older ones, scattered throughout the state, have been recorded. This species ranges from 2 to 7 feet tall and can often be distinguished by the upper leaves which are often deeply 3-5 lobed, rounded in both the sinus and the lobe. The petioles are winged, which is not common in the genus. The flowers are yellow to yellow white. It blooms from August to October. The habitat tends to be sandy, but may be oak-hickory woods, pine woods or other dryish woods.



***Prenanthes trifoliolata* (Cassini) Fern.** Lion's Foot, is recorded from 5 current and 7 older counties, mostly in the eastern and southern parts of West Virginia. The leaves are relatively large 3-5 palmately divided, with angular lobes and sinuses. The flowers are a pale yellow. Flowers may be found from August through October in moist oak hickory woods, swampy low woodlands, and sandy areas. ♣



Illustrations from:  
Britton, N.L., and A. Brown. 1913. An illustrated flora of the northern United States, Canada and the British

Possessions. 3 vols. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York. Vol. 2: 711. Courtesy of Kentucky Native Plant Society. Scanned by Omnitek Inc.