

Asarum canadense

North American Native



Asarum (a-sah-rum)
Greek and Latin name.
Family

canadense (kan-a-den-see)
meaning of Canada or
North Eastern America.



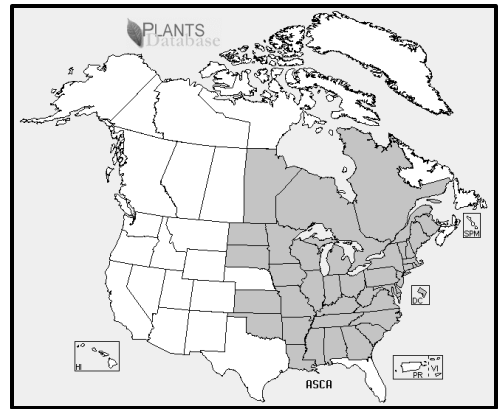
Zones: 3 – 8 **Flower Color:** Purplish-brown **Height:** 5 – 12” **Spacing:** 12”

About the Species:

Common Name: Wild Ginger **Family:** Aristolochiaceae

Two light green heart-shaped leaves on each stem shade the purplish-brown flower below. The 3-6” leaves are thick & fuzzy with prominent veins. Wild Ginger spreads by creeping rhizomes, making a dense mound of 1-1.5’. The flowers, blooming underneath the foliage in April and May, are noted as having the appearance of little knocked over pots or jugs.

Habitat: Native to rich mesic soils in shady deciduous forests of eastern North America.



USDA Plants Database

In the Garden: *Asarum canadense* is tolerant of dry conditions but may flop over when dry. It will quickly recover with rain or watering. Wild ginger is suited to naturalizing, or use in the woodland garden, native plant or shade garden. The flowers are used as an alternative food source for the Pipevine Swallowtail Butterfly.

Other Uses: The combination of spiciness and a pleasant odor of the rhizomatous roots of Wild Ginger gave way to many uses. Native Americans taught the early settlers to peel the roots for use as a spicy flavoring to pep up pioneer baked goods or to boil with sugar as a bread and pastry spice. The left over liquid was boiled down to syrup that was used on pancakes, etc... The highly aromatic roots of *Asarum canadense* were also cooked into questionable meat to prevent the danger of ptomaine poisoning.



How low can you grow?

I garden in an area that is adjacent to a state park. The woodland behind the house is filled with a variety of shade loving wildflowers. One of my favorites has always been the Wild Ginger. The blanket of soft green leaves show up nicely against the brown leaf litter. I have always been intrigued with the brownish flowers that hug the ground. The flowers are so low to the ground that they attract carrion/dung flies (who think they have found something that is decomposing), beetles, ants and slugs. The flies are attracted to the fetid odor and the slugs like to eat the fuzzy inside part of the flower. Thought to be self-pollinating, *Asarum* seeds are carried away by ants that eat the elaiosome that is attached to the seed and in that manor are dispersed. My goal is to one day make paths, not just follow deer trails, through this woodland where special plants like *Asarum* and showy orchids can be viewed up closely.