

Eco-Friendly Native Plant of the Month

JANUARY 2018

NC NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

REEDY CREEK NATURE PRESERVE



Photos by Will Stuart and Larry Mellichamp

Hexastylis arifolia Heartleaf-Ginger

Find the piggies!

If you are playing plant-hide-and-seek with young friends, there is no better plant than Heartleaf-Ginger. The brown flowers are hidden beneath the leaves in spring and often called little piggies or little brown jugs. You will need to peek under the leaves. Seeds are rarely seen and believed to be dispersed by ants. The glossy mottled leaves stand out from other woodland ground covering plants, and from the leafy mulch and shrubs found in most woodland gardens.

Heartleaf-Ginger is a slow growing and clumping plant that typically grows 6-12 inches tall. Found in dry to moist woodlands, and typically acid soils, Heartleaf-Ginger can withstand drought once established.

Use to Replace Ivy

Hexastylis arifolia can be used as an attractive evergreen woodland perennial. However, because it is relatively slow growing, it is best mixed with other low woodland species such as Christmas Fern, Lady Fern, Green-and-Gold, Atamasco Lily, and spring ephemerals such as Bloodroot and Foam Flower. It looks

nice under woodland trees and shrubs such as Azaleas, Sourwood, and Mountain Laurel, providing a layered effect that is visually appealing. The deciduous native Wild Ginger *Asarum canadense*, is in a separate genus, but the two are often confused. Wild Ginger is a more vigorous spreader and Heartleaf-Ginger is an evergreen clumper, (but there are spreading forms).

Medicinal Uses

You may have wondered about the common name, "Ginger." According to research early American settlers noticed how Native Americans used the Gingers as flavoring, and also noticed the mild ginger-like smell, hence the name. There is some evidence that these plants have also been used medicinally.

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Nestled in the leaf mulch...

As a woodland plant, Heartleaf-Ginger thrives among leaf litter, providing a multitude of garden eco-benefits:

- Soil holding ability on steep slopes with its deep spreading roots
- Weed control as the evergreen leafy clumps spread
- Spongy material to soak up rain water against drought
- Habitat for small fungus gnats and other tiny animals