

Canadian wild ginger (*Asarum canadense*)

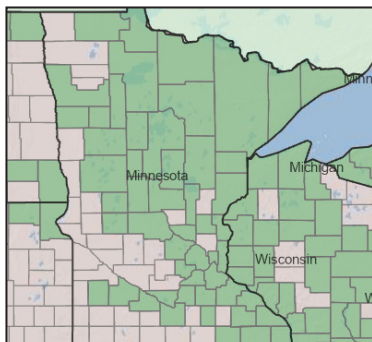
Family: Birthwort (Aristolochiaceae)

DESCRIPTION: Canadian wild ginger is a low-growing perennial found in deciduous forest understories. It's easily recognized by its bright green, heart-shaped leaves, fuzzy stems, and brownish flowers near the ground. The flowers, which smell like decaying organic matter, attract flies and beetles. Seeds are dispersed by ants, which feed on the oily, fleshy appendage attached to the seed.

USES: Its aromatic root was once used as a ginger substitute in cooking and in Native American traditional remedies. Consumption is not recommended, as even small amounts can be mildly toxic to humans. The plant supports native bees and beetles, and shelters small ground-dwelling animals. It's ideal for native plantings and erosion control.

REFERENCES:

[Minnesota Wildflowers](#)
[Illinois Wildflowers](#)
[University of Wisconsin Extension](#)
[U.S. Forest Service](#)



Range Map Credit: USDA Plants Database



Photo Credit: Annie Gunness

Planting Recommendations

Canadian wild ginger prefers shady or partly shaded spots with moist, well-drained soils rich in organic matter. It thrives where leaf litter helps keep the soil damp. For best results, plant bare-root divisions or transplants in early spring or fall. Seeds benefit from cold-moist stratification and may take up to two years to germinate. Plant seeds directly or store them moist in the refrigerator. They often require double dormancy, with a 60- to 90-day warm period followed by a 60- to 90-day cold-moist

period. Seeds sown outdoors in spring typically germinate the following year. Dividing mature clumps yields faster results. Once established, it spreads slowly by rhizomes, forming a lush, weed-resistant ground cover. It pairs well with woodland phlox, ferns and other shade-loving natives. While deer don't typically find it appetizing, new plantings may need protection until firmly rooted. With regular watering during dry spells, the plant offers years of dependable, low-maintenance growth.

**STATEWIDE
WETLAND
INDICATOR
STATUS:** FACU

ID: Canadian wild ginger has soft, velvety, heart-shaped leaves that emerge in early spring, growing in pairs and reaching 4 to 6 inches wide. Its small maroon-to-purplish flowers with three curved petals grow near the ground and bloom in April and May, often hidden beneath the foliage.

SIMILAR SPECIES:

Heart-leaved foamflower (*Tiarella cordifolia*) forms ground cover but has showy white flowers on upright stems. European wild ginger (*Asarum europaeum*) is a non-native, less cold-hardy plant with glossier, evergreen leaves.

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