



Garden Clippings



Niagara College Greenhouse Centre Success Sheet No. 60

Wild Ginger

Description

Wild ginger, *Asarum canadense*, is a perennial plant that grows under deciduous trees, forming a green mat in the woods.

It has large heart- or kidney-shaped leaves that are hairy, dark green and deeply cupped at the stem. The leaves grow in opposite pairs to a height of about 8 to 10 inches.

The small, deep, bowl-shaped, purple-brown flower grows at the base, between the leaf stem and the ground. The blossom is single, short stemmed and hairy outside and seems to split open into three outwardly folded petals. It flowers from March to May.

The root is a long rhizome (underground stem), and it is light green, tender and crispy. When crushed, it has a strong antiseptic smell.

Location

It can be found growing on moist, rich soils in shady woodlands in eastern North America from New Brunswick to Kansas. Wild ginger prefers a rich, moist, neutral soil with a pH of 5 to 7.5.

Harvest and Preparation

The roots can be gathered in spring or fall, but after first frost is best. All the nutrients go down to the root of the plant, making the medicine stronger.

Once the roots are picked, clean them off and let them dry completely. Dried roots can be burned as incense and are said to repel insects.

When the roots are dried, you can make a tea by putting a small amount of broken root into boiling water. (The amount can be adjusted to suit personal preference.) Let the tea steep; the longer it steeps, the stronger the healing properties will be. When the tea is done, the roots can be taken out and dried for reuse.

To make a deodorant, make it like the tea. Just let it cool; then put it into a spray bottle.

Ailments It Relieves

Native Americans used wild-ginger tea as a birth-control agent and to relieve heart ailments and indigestion.

It also helps with colds, fevers, coughs, cramps and diarrhea. It is a good expectorant and diuretic and is great for colic in children.

It can be used as a gargle for sore throat, laryngitis, sore gums and bad breath.

A spray can be made from the decoction and can be used as a deodorant and antiseptic.

Wild ginger can also be used as a ginger substitute and possibly in the treatment of tumors since it contains aristolochic acid, a known anti-tumor compound.

Side Effect

When gathering specimens, make sure to get the roots only. The flowers and stems are not edible; they are said to be poisonous.

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