



Bruce Trail  
CONSERVANCY



## Wild Ginger (*Asarum canadense*)

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Photo: Wikipedia, Chris S. Packard - Own work

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### Did You Know?

Common name comes from the ginger flavor of the roots.

It is considered a Threatened species in Maine.

It is unrelated to the common Ginger used in cooking.

Habitat – Grows best in rich, moist areas in shaded deciduous forests over calcareous rock.

Size – Very low growing plant rising less than 15cm from the ground.

Range – Eastern North America but not into Florida.

Status – Ontario, S5 secure/Canada, secure

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## Identification:

Very distinct appearance with its heart-shaped, large leaves covered in soft hairs arising from hairy petioles. The single flower is a dark mauve colour and lies between the leaf stalks just barely off the ground. It has 3 petals that fuse together to form a tube. The flowers appear early in April or May and are often hidden beneath the leaves. It often grows in large patches.



Photo: Flower by B.Popelier

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## Interesting Facts

It was used for many medical ailments by Native Americans such as dysentery, digestive problems, swollen breasts, coughs and colds, typhus, scarlet fever, nerves, sore throats, cramps, heaves, earaches, headaches, convulsions, asthma, tuberculosis, urinary disorders, and venereal disease. Early settlers cooked it with sugar as a substitute for real ginger.

In summer when the seeds form, the plant attracts ants with elaiosomes. These are structures on the seeds which the ants love to feed to their young. They harvest the seeds and bring them back to their nest where the larvae eat the elaiosome and leave the seed to begin another plant.

Even though it has a historical use of medical and culinary uses, caution should be advised before consumption as there is evidence that the plant actually has carcinogenic properties and other toxic effects.

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## Wild Ginger on the Niagara Escarpment

The Bruce Trail Conservancy is continually acquiring and conserving land along the Niagara Escarpment, including areas where Wild Ginger can be found. It is common to come across this plant as you hike through the majestic forests along the Bruce Trail, just remember to enjoy it in its natural habitat, take a picture, leave it be and especially do not eat it.