Wild Ginger

(Hexastylis arifolia)

Birthwort Family - Aristolochiaceae

Growing close to the ground with leaves that are evergreen, wild ginger is easy to spot during the winter months in mature, hardwood forests. The

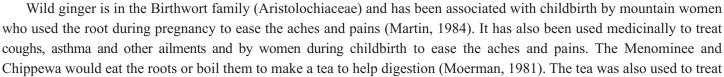
heart-shaped leaves are pale, whitish-green with dark green veins and margins. At the base of the plant, the flower bud is forming that will open early in the spring into a small, maroon to brown cup-shaped flower with three petals, coming together at the base. The flowers are often described as resembling little brown jugs, another common name. To see the

flowers, lift the leaves carefully from around the plant. Because the flowers are on the ground, they rely on ants or beetles to pollinate them.

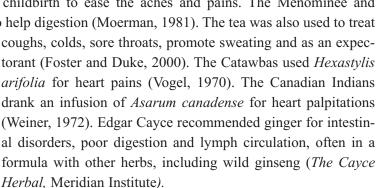
The plants spread underground by horizontal stems just beneath the surface, and are fairly easy to dig. Use kitchen scissors to snip off small sections of the root and then replant. This way it continues to spread and you haven't hurt the plant.

Uses

Leaves and roots have an aromatic smell similar to sassafras due to the safrole contained in them. An extract from the leaves and roots has been used as a flavoring. The roots can be made into a syrup. Traditionally, root and leaf infusions were used to treat heart and lung conditions (Plant Database, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center).







Wild Ginger Syrup

3 oz. (90g) wild ginger roots, chopped

1/4 c. sugar

3/4 cup water

Combine sugar and water. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat, add chopped ginger roots and reduce heat Simmer 20-30 minutes.

