

VNPS Piedmont Chapter WILDFLOWER of the WEEK

WILDFLOWER #44 answer: PUTTYROOT (*Aplectrum hyemale*)

Puttyroot makes the most of winter (the meaning of *hyemale*). When other plants drop their leaves, puttyroot stands out. In rich deciduous woods, its one or two large, dark green leaves, with thin white stripes, are in striking contrast with the leaf litter. Turn a leaf over, and the back is light purple. The leaves make food from late fall to early spring, whenever the temperature rises even slightly above freezing.

The food is stored in a series of globed corms. The corms have a sticky sap, a ðputtyö that once was used to repair crockery. They also account for the other common name, Adam-and-Eve. Like Eve from Adam's side, each year a new corm springs from the old one, joined by a thready rhizome. ðEveö bears the next year's leaf. Double corms were once worn as amulets or dropped into water to tell fortunes.

When other plants photosynthesize, puttyroot is already up to reproduction. The leaves disintegrate before the flower stalk grows in June. Bearing numerous small white-to-pinkish flowers, the ðghostlyö stalk blends with the forest floor, escaping predators' notice. Spurless (the meaning of *aplectrum*), the flowers have no nectar, and it seems that insects overlook them too. Only one Halictid bee is sometimes fooled into visiting. Nonetheless there is a high level of seedset, even when researchers remove the stamens. Probably, then, these beautiful flowers are self-fertile and inbred.

When seeds do develop, seed capsules hang down their ribbed elliptical pouches. Sometimes, too, a small clonal colony develops, thanks to the help of symbiotic fungi. Virginia is at the center of the range of this orchid, which is endangered or threatened in several states.

WILDFLOWER #45

Clues: Corky ridges and warts cover the trunk.



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