

VNPS Piedmont Chapter WILDFLOWER of the WEEK

WILDFLOWER #73 answer: HOG PEANUT (*Amphicarpaea bracteata*)

Hog peanut leads a double life. It has two kinds of flowers and two kinds of fruit. Hence the name: *amphi* means “both” and *carpos* means “fruit.”

Aboveground, small irregular flowers hang in clusters. Each elongated, lilac-to-white flower is held by a fused tube of green, pointed sepals. These easy-to-see flowers are chasmogamous, meaning open, available to cross-pollination. They are mostly pollinated by bees. These flowers produce pods, pointed at each end, with multiple seeds and a bract under each aerial fruit. If seeds are not eaten, they shoot out of the pods, landing at a distance.

Meanwhile, at ground level or underground, other flowers never open. They are cleistogamous, meaning they reproduce in secret, and they are self-pollinated. Each of these closed flowers produces a pod with just one large seed. The buried seeds sprout close to the parent plant, unless something digs them out. Wild hogs, ruffed grouse, ring-necked pheasant, and meadow voles eat them, and humans can too.

The hog peanut has “leaves of three,” but you need not let them be. The three leaflets are parts of a single leaf, like poison ivy, but the smooth-edged leaf of hog peanut is asymmetrical and wider near the base. It springs on a long delicate stalk from a stem with appressed white hairs, whose growing tip coils around other plants. Poison ivy clings instead by hairlike aerial roots.

Hog peanut leaves are a larval host for silver-spotted skippers, gold-banded skippers, and northern cloudywing butterflies. The roots, as in most of the pea family, the Fabaceae, are host to a soil bacterium which takes nitrogen from the air and fixes it into a form that plants can use.

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Clues: Odd purplish flowers bloom on a tall candelabrum.



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