
Wildflower Spot – April 2010
John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

JACK-IN-THE-PULPIT

Arisaema triphyllum

By Helen Hamilton, *President of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*

This easy to grow native wildflower has unusual foliage and flower. The striped green and purple canopy (spathe) curves gracefully over a club-shaped spadix (the “Jack” or preacher in his canopied pulpit). The spathe is sometimes all green. The lower portion of the spadix carries tiny flowers of one or both sexes, where heat and odor are produced, attracting pollinating flies. A single 3-parted leaf on a long stalk then expands and overtops the spathe.

Fruits are smooth, shiny green berries clustered at the base of the thickened spadix; they ripen in late summer when the spathe and leaf wither, revealing the cluster of bright red berries borne on a stalk 1-2 feet high, replacing the leaf and flower.

Jack-in-the-Pulpit is an excellent choice for a shade or woodland wildflower garden where it will thrive in rich soil and partial to full shade. It is very easy to cultivate and requires little care, and grows under a variety of conditions. It partners well with columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*) and foamflower (*Tiarella cordifolia*).

Native in all counties of Virginia, this woodland plant is found in every state east of the Mississippi, and extends through central U.S.



to the borders of Colorado and Utah and into Canada.

While birds and mammals eat the berries of this plant, all parts produce intensely irritating calcium oxalate crystals. American Indians knew that cooking and drying eliminated the bitter taste; roots were used as a vegetable, ground for bread doughs, and used for a variety of medicinal purposes.

Arisaema refers to the plant's resemblance to other members of the Arum family; haima (blood) refers to some species bearing red blotches. The plant's 3 leaflets are reflected by the species name *triphyllum*. ❖

Photo: Jack-in-the-Pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*) taken by Phillip Merritt
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