
Wildflower Spot – December 2009
John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

COMMON GROUND-PINE

Dendrolycopodium obscurum

By Helen Hamilton, *Past-president of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*

This familiar plant of rich woods looks like a miniature pine tree, hence its other common names of “Princess Pine” and “Tree Clubmoss.” The stems are upright, to a foot tall, bearing several repeatedly forked, somewhat flattened side branches. With deep, creeping, underground stems, the plant often forms large colonies. From July through September, spores are formed in yellowish cylindrical “cones” arising from some upper branches.

Common Ground-pine occurs in every county of Virginia, usually in acidic upland forests, and rich, damp woodlands. The species is common eastern U.S. and Canada and ranges northwest into Asia.

Also found in every county in Virginia, Running-cedar (*Diphasiastrum digitatum* [*Lycopodium digitatum*]) is common in dry open woods and meadows. Its branches form flattened



fans, their tiny leaves in four rows. A cluster of two to four cones form at the tip of a long erect stalk. This species, also known as Southern Ground Cedar, is native only to eastern North America.

Both these species have been heavily collected for wreaths and Christmas decorations. ❖

Photo: Common Ground-pine (*Dendrolycopodium obscurum*) taken by Helen Hamilton
For more information about native plants visit www.vnps.org.