
Wildflower Spot – January 2012
John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

WINTERGREEN

Chimaphila maculata

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

Although a small plant, Wintergreen is well-named with its distinctive dark green leaves striped with white appearing just above the dry leaf litter. The leaves are pointed and finely toothed, wider toward the tip and whorled or scattered along the stem. Growing no more than 10" high, small white or pinkish, nodding waxy flowers appear in a cluster on a slender stalk. Flowers appear June through August, and mature to small capsules with seeds that are dispersed by the wind.

Wintergreen grows in dry, often sandy pine and oak forests. Found in every county in Virginia, and in the eastern United States, the plant ranges from Maine to Florida, west to Illinois and Mississippi, and also occurs in parts of Arizona.

This is not the edible wintergreen used to flavor candies – that species is *Gaultheria procumbens*, which grows in many counties of Virginia, other than those along the coast.



The genus name *Chimaphila* is derived from the Greek *chima*, meaning “winter” and *philein*, “to love.” The species name *maculate* means “spot” or “spotted,” referring to the coloration of the leaves, which are, however, striped, and not spotted. ❖

Photo: Wintergreen (*Chimaphila maculata*) taken by Helen Hamilton
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