



RARE PLANTS OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

Squirrel Corn

Dicentra canadensis (Goldie) Walp. **Synonyms:** turkey corn, corydalus

Poppy family (Papaveraceae, formerly of Fumariaceae)

What Does It Look Like?

This small perennial herb flowers in the spring before the tree leaves fully expand, and while there is still sun shining down on the forest floor. Plants fruit and usually wither early in the growing season and spend the rest of the year underground. These plants store their energy in small yellow rounded bulblets that somewhat resemble kernels of corn, hence the common name.

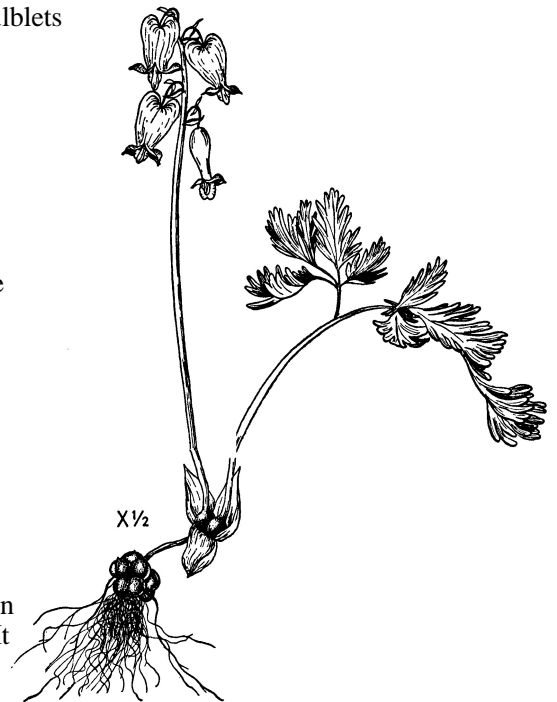
Leaves: Usually one highly-divided fern-like leaf per flower stem, bluish-green in color, often with a light whitish or waxy surface coating.

Flowers: The white to lightly pink heart-shaped flowers line up along the top half of the stem in a raceme. The scientific name *Dicentra* translates from Greek as "two spurs." The spurs are the two nectar-producing halves of the heart that form the shoulders. Four petals, two that clasp together and two that open, form the point and the opening. Flowers appear in late April to early June.

Fruit: A 10-20 seeded capsule. The seeds are crested.

Key features: The flowers and the yellow underground bulblets are distinctive.

Similar species: Dutchman's breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*) is a more common species that is often found growing alongside squirrel corn. It has very similar leaves but they lack a whitish or waxy coating, and tend to be more yellowish-green. Two leaves usually occur on flowering plants. The flowers are somewhat similar but the spurs of the flower, or the shoulders, are pointed and triangular rather than rounded as they are in squirrel corn. Also, the tubers are white or pink, and tear-shaped. Flowering is usually about a week earlier than squirrel corn.



Where Is It Found?

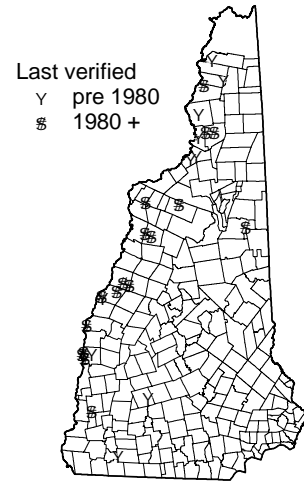
This northern species grows on talus slopes and in rich mesic forests. In New Hampshire, populations are found primarily within the Connecticut River valley. Soils in this area are enriched, moist, can be very deep, and are very productive for plant growth. Sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*) is usually the dominant tree species where squirrel corn is found, along with white ash (*Fraxinus americana*), and sometimes basswood (*Tilia americana*), yellow birch (*Betula alleghaniensis*), and American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*). In the lower Connecticut River valley, hickory (*Carya* spp.) and butternut (*Juglans cinerea*) are also associated with squirrel corn, as well as a few rare trees such as hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*) and bladdernut (*Staphylea trifolia*). Because of the nutrient-rich conditions, many other rare herbaceous species are typically found growing in the same area as squirrel corn.



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Conservation status: Squirrel corn is threatened in New Hampshire. Of 27 locations, only 17 have been verified since 1980. Populations range from a few individuals to thousands of plants growing over an area greater than 0.4 ha (1 ac.).

Range: Quebec and Nova Scotia, south to North Carolina, west to Missouri, north to Minnesota.



Why Is It Rare?

The rich mesic forests where squirrel corn grows are relatively rare in New Hampshire and usually occur as small patches.

Conservation Considerations:

Intensive logging and development are the primary threats to squirrel corn and the rich mesic forests it is found in. These plants are adapted to growing in shade from closed forest canopies. Logging can disrupt populations in many ways, including directly disturbing the plants and soil, and increasing sunlight which favors more competitive plant species. Removal of vegetation associated with tree harvesting removes essential nutrients that would otherwise recycle within the forest community. Nutrient loss can also result from soil disruption and erosion, particularly where natural drainage patterns have been altered. Favorable moisture levels are also decreased by increased sunlight.

Disturbance can also result in the introduction of non-native invasive species, a serious threat to many native plant species and natural community types.

The information in this fact sheet is current as of December 2002. It is based on a database maintained by the NH Natural Heritage Program, a bureau in the Division of Forests & Lands in the Department of Resources and Economic Development. NH Natural Heritage is a member of NatureServe, which represents an international network of Heritage programs. Illustration by Walter Lincoln Graham. Reprinted with permission from The New York Botanical Garden Press. Originally published in H. A. Gleason, *The New Britton and Brown Illustrated Flora of the Northeastern United States and Adjacent Canada*, Vol. II, p.201, copyright 1952, The New York Botanical Garden.

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