

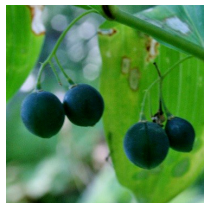
BWSR Featured Plant

Name: Smooth Solomon’s seal (*Polygonatum biflorum*)

Plant family: Butcher’s broom (*Ruscaceae*)

The name Solomon’s seal may refer to circular marks on the rhizomes where the previous years’ stems were attached. Some think the marks resemble the seal of King Solomon. Fruits ripen by late summer and provide food for woodland birds.

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Susan Nelson



A graceful native woodland perennial, smooth Solomon’s seal typically grows 2 to 4 feet long, its arching stems bearing white or creamy tubular flowers in spring and dark blue berries in summer. Many kinds of bees gather nectar and pollen from the flowers. Woodland birds eat the berries. Deer may browse the plant heavily, but without predation Solomon’s seal will form patches of attractive plants that thrive in semi-shaded gardens or native plantings. Polygonatum means “many knees,” referring to the knobby shape of the plant’s underground stem (rhizome). One to several – often two – flowers grow from the leaf axils, giving the plant its specific epithet, biflorum, meaning “twin-flowered.”

Plant Stats

STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR STATUS: FACU

PRIMARY USES: Pollinator and wildlife benefit, shade gardening, native plantings

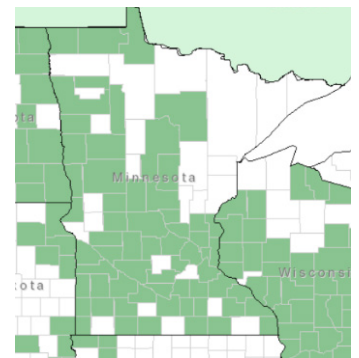
Identification

Smooth Solomon’s seal has alternate, smooth leaves up to 6 inches long and 3 inches wide with parallel veins. The leaves are lighter on the underside. The base of the leaf clasps the stem. The round, smooth stems’ waxy coating lends them a blue-green color. The stems typically arch

as they grow, reaching 2 to 4 feet long. Solomon’s seal blooms in late spring, producing clusters of one to four white or off-white flowers that hang from the upper leaf axils. Flowers grow a half-inch to 1 inch long. Berries ripen from green to dark blue by late summer.

Range

Solomon’s seal grows in open or semi-shaded habitats in many parts of Minnesota. Its range includes the eastern two-thirds of the U.S. and adjacent Canadian provinces. Solomon’s seal is more common in deciduous woodlands, but it is also found in meadows and prairies.



Range map source: USDA NRCS Plants Database

Planting Recommendations

Solomon's seal grows best in loamy soils with light shade and moderate moisture. It will spread to form patches. White-tailed deer may browse the plant heavily, so it may not thrive where large deer populations exist. Seeds, plants and bare-root stock are available from many nurseries. To ensure the plant is adapted to local conditions and was propagated rather than



Flower buds grow from the leaf axils in early spring.

removed from the wild, it is best to purchase native plants from a trusted local source.

Uses

Solomon's seal adds a tall, graceful line to a garden or native planting. The blue-green cast of its leaves and stems, its hanging flower clusters and its blue fruits provide interest from spring into late summer. Bumble

bees (*Bombus* species), digger bees (*Anthophora* species) and other bee species collect pollen and nectar from the flowers. Ruby-throated hummingbirds are known to visit. The fruits attract birds.

Similar Species

The closely related hairy Solomon's seal (*Polygonatum pubescens*) has hairs along the veins on the leaves' undersides. False Solomon's seal (*Maianthemum racemosum*) produces flowers at the end of the stem, not at the axils. Its fruits are red, not blue. The leaves of false Solomon's seal are green on both sides. Their bases do not clasp the stem.



Left column: False Solomon's seal flowers are found only at the end of the stem. The lower leaf surface is green. **Right column:** Smooth Solomon's seal flowers hang from leaf axils. Leaves are hairless, and lighter on the undersides.

References

USDA NRCS Plants Database: <https://plants.usda.gov/core/profile?symbol=pobi2>

Minnesota Wildflowers: <https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/flower/smooth-solomons-seal>

Illinois Wildflowers: http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/woodland/plants/solomon_seal.htm

Pollinators of Native Plants, by Heather Holm; Pollination Press LLC; 2014

Developed by Susan Nelson