

# Spikenard (*Aralia racemosa*)

**Family: Ginseng**  
**(*Araliaceae*)**

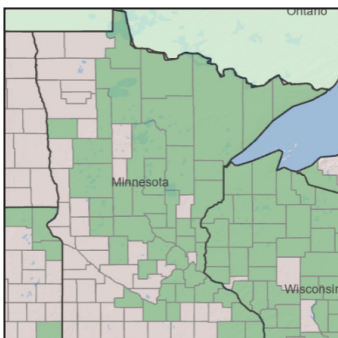
**DESCRIPTION:** Spikenard is a showy perennial that grows up to 5 feet tall and produces clusters of white or greenish-white flowers, which ripen to wine-colored, berrylike fruits in late summer. This distinctive native plant thrives in well-drained mesic soil and partial sun. It grows singly or in small groups in woodlands, and often occurs on slopes.

**USES:** The tiny, shallow flowers offer pollen and nectar to small, short-tongued native bees such as masked bees (*Hylaeus*) and several genera of sweat bees (Halictidae family). Frequent pollinators include solitary mason wasps (Eumeninae subfamily) and carrot wasps (*Gasteruption*). Chipmunks and songbirds eat the berries and help to disperse the seeds.

**REFERENCES:**

[Minnesota Wildflowers](#)

American Wildlife & Plants: A Guide to Wildlife Food Habits; A. Martin, H. Zim, A. Nelson



**Range Map Credit:** USDA Plants Database



**Photo Credit:** Heather Holm

## Planting Recommendations

A large, versatile plant with a unique form, spikenard adds interest and texture to part-shade gardens. Because it will tower above lower-growing native woodland perennials, it is most effective as a specimen plant. Mature plants are deep-rooted and can be difficult to transplant, so be sure to select an appropriate site. Consider its mature

size when selecting a site so that it won't shade out or overwhelm neighboring plants. Native woodland sedges such as Pennsylvania sedge or long-beaked sedge provide a contrasting foliage texture. To propagate this plant, cold-moist stratify the seeds for 60 days. In the fall, freshly collected seed can be planted right away.

**Developed by Heather Holm**, a pollinator conservationist and [author](#) whose four published books include "Pollinators of Native Plants" and "Bees: An Identification and Native Plant Forage Guide"



**STATEWIDE WETLAND INDICATOR STATUS:**  
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**ID:** The shrublike plant grows 2 to 5 feet tall and 2 to 3 feet wide, with a thick woody rootstock, zig-zagging hollow stems and a twice-compound leaf arrangement. The large, sharply pointed heart-shaped leaves are coarsely serrated. The five-parted white or greenish-white flowers are arranged in a pattern resembling the spokes of an umbrella, and form a long linear and typically terminal flower panicle. The fruit ripens from light green to a deep wine color.

**SIMILAR SPECIES:**

Wild sarsaparilla (*Aralia nudicaulis*) belongs to the same genus, but is a low-growing, spreading perennial. Both wild sarsaparilla and spikenard have roots with an earthy root beer fragrance. Spikenard is quite unique in appearance and form due to its maroon stems, large compound leaves, and large form. Given its size, it is more likely to be mistaken for a shrub or small tree than a perennial.