

## **Araliaceae**

### **ginseng family**

This is a relatively large family, but with few species in Nova Scotia. They are mostly woody plants of the tropics and subtropics, although a few perennials are also known.

It is typified by its umbellate inflorescences of tiny flowers. The flowers are five-merous and regular, although outer ones may be irregular. The calyx is reduced to a whorl of teeth around the ovary or absent. Stamens are distinct and alternating with the petals. Ovary is inferior and compound (2–5 carpels). Fruits are berries or drupes. The styles are swollen at the base, forming a disk fused to the nectary disk. Alternate leaves are compound or lobed. Each has a decurrent petiole.

#### Keys to genera

- A. Plants woody vines, trailing on the ground or climbing on other plants or structures. *Hedera*
- aa. Plants upright, herbs or shrubs. B
- B. Leaves strictly alternate or basal, pinnate; flowers in 2 or more umbels. *Aralia*
- bb. Leaves in a single whorl, palmate; umbel solitary. *Panax*

### ***Aralia* L.**

It is a genus of 35 species of Asia and North America. Three species reach Nova Scotia; all are herbaceous or half-shrubby and they may be bristly or thorny. Flowers are five-merous. Styles are joined at the base and are persistent in fruit.

#### Key to species

- A. Plants with scapes; leaves and peduncle arising from the rhizome. *Aralia nudicaulis*
- aa. Plants with leafy stems. B
- B. Umbels in a loose cluster; stem bristly below. *A. hispida*
- bb. Umbels in a large terminal panicle; unarmed. *A. racemosa*

***Aralia hispida* Vent.**

**Bristly Sarsaparilla; aralie hispide**



*Photo by Sean Blaney*

Thorny or sharply bristly at the base of the plant, the armament reduces in density distally. Leaflets are lanceolate or ovate. A few umbels are arranged in a corymbiform inflorescence. Fruits are black. Insipid.

Flowers in July.

Successional, after fire or clearing, around sawmills and in light, barren soil.

Common throughout.

Ranges from NF to SK, south to IL and SC.



*Photo by Martin Thomas*

***Aralia nudicaulis* L.**

**Wild Sarsaparilla; aralie à tige nue**



*Photo by Martin Thomas*

Stem is vestigial or absent. Leaves 3–5 arising from an ascending petiole, each compound with 3–5 leaflets, ovate to obovate or lanceolate. Plants may reach 50cm tall. Umbellate flowers, 3–4 on a peduncle, are usually shorter than the scapes.

Flowers often overlooked, from May to July.

Dry soils in mixed woodlands and old forests.



Photo by Marian Munro

Common throughout.

Across Canada to YT and south to GA and CO.

***Aralia racemosa* L.**

**American Spikenard; aralie à grappes**



Photo by Sean Blaney

A tall robust shrub, to 2m, it is freely branching from a woody stem. Leaves are pinnate, with five sharply serrate leaflets. Each leaflet is broadly ovate, cordate at the base, glabrous or pubescent. The inflorescence is made up of many umbels, forming a large panicle. Fruits are purplish and succulent.

Flowers during July and early August.

Fertile or calcareous soils beneath mixed deciduous forests, often on slopes. Solitary plants rather than colonies.

Scattered in Annapolis and Lunenburg counties to northern Cape Breton. Absent along the Atlantic in the more acidic soils. Never frequent when found.

NS to MB, largely south to AZ and GA.



Photo by Sean Blaney

***Hedera helix* L.****English Ivy ; lierre commun***Photo by Sean Blaney*

It is a widely planted groundcover, both variegated and green forms are grown.

Now naturalizing near gardens where it was formerly cultivated.

It is frequently seen around Wolfville and more recently at Tusket Falls, Yarmouth Co.

Elsewhere it has naturalized from NY to TX and on the west coast where it has official Weed status in some jurisdictions.

***Panax* L.****Ginseng**

Only eight species comprise this genus, with one species reaching Nova Scotia. It is a perennial herb, its unbranched stem arising from a deep tuber. Leaves are arranged in a single whorl of 3–5 palmately divided leaves. The leaflets may be oblanceolate or lanceolate and serrulate on the margins. Flowers bear five stamens and petals, but only three styles, producing drupes.

***Panax trifolius* L.****Dwarf Ginseng; ginseng à trois folioles***Photo by Sean Blaney*

Stems are simple and glabrous arising from the deeply rooted tubers. Leaves and leaflets glabrous, leaflets oblanceolate. The single umbel of flowers arises on a long slender peduncle, extending above the leaves.

Flowers in June.

Open woodland, especially deciduous forests, with well-



*Photo by Sean Blaney*

drained and fertile soils. Intervalles.

Local in Kings and Annapolis counties. Common along the northern slopes of central NS, from Cumberland eastward to Antigonish Co. and infrequent further eastward to Inverness Co.

Ranges from NS to ON, south to MN and GA.