

Tiarella cordifolia (Foamflower)

Botanical Bytes
By Gregory Bruner

Foliage Height: 10"-12"
Foliage Width: 10"-12"
Flower Height: 12"-18"
Foliage Color: Green
Flower Color: White
USDA Hardiness: 3-8
Moisture: Average - moist
Light: Part Sun - Shade



Tiarella cordifolia is definitely one of the more adventurous plants I have found in my plant hunting travels. Normally it creeps around the woodland's leaf-covered floor, but sometimes it gets bored with this plain conformist lifestyle and has been known to be found clinging to rocks in the middle of a stream or tenaciously holding onto a sheer stone beside a waterfall. North to Maine and Michigan or south to Mississippi and Georgia, if this critter wants to grow it will find a way.

The Native American Indian Cherokee and Iroquois tribes had a few medicinal uses for Foamflower. Poultices were applied for physical injuries and pain relief, while infusions were used for eye and mouth problems in children. A unique purpose was a decoction from the whole plant that was used to clean their hunting rifles.

We have established that this leafy fellow has an overpowering will to grow where it wants to, but is it a good fit for your garden? Foamflower is a small, polite-looking evergreen, which may die back to a rosette of leaves at the crown if very cold. It is a shade-loving plant that asks only for an average well-drained soil possessing average to moist conditions. Yes, I believe it has a place in many gardens.

The lobed and fringed foliage is a definite attraction that ranges in color from green to green tinged with burgundy markings. A mass planting is quite a sight when in flower. The puffs of white flowers over the mass of green resemble creamy white foam atop a green sea. The name Foamflower was definitely derived from this image. The delicate puffs of white are really stems topped with tiny individual flowers that, upon close examination, are beautiful in their miniature perfection. When the temperatures begin to drop in the fall, the lush green foliage turns reddish and begins yet another season of interest.

Because Tiarella cordifolia is visited by both butterflies and bees, it is beneficial to wildlife in the spring, while deer and rabbits generally avoid it to the joy of many a gardener. Foamflower has few pest issues, but slugs and snails will occasionally pay it a visit. This is generally not a huge problem. While we may find it clinging to rocks in streams and by waterfalls, it actually does not like wet feet, so be careful to keep it away from constantly wet, boggy situations.

Foamflower is a must for most shade gardens. Whether as a specimen where its lush fringed and lobed foliage can be admired, or as a mass planting taming the woodland floor, this is a workhorse and a winner. On a hiking trail or in your own backyard, Tiarella cordifolia can be enjoyed year round.