



***Medeola virginiana* L.**
Indian Cucumber-root

LILIACEAE (Lily Family)

Blooming season: May-June

Plant:

Unbranched perennial, 30-75 cm high; rhizome 2.5-7.5 cm long



Leaves:

2 leaf whorls - the upper at top of stem, the lower halfway up.

Upper: usually 3 short petioled or sessile leaves 2.5-5 cm long and 1.5-2.5 cm wide; by fall stained deep red in center.

Lower: 5-11 sessile leaves 5-13 cm long and 2.5-5 cm wide.

Leaves 3-5 nerved, narrowed at base, apex tapered to a point; persisting through fall.



Flower:

Yellow to greenish yellow, 1 cm.

Drooping from pedicel about 1 cm long, becoming erect in fruit.

3 equal perianth segments, recurved, with 3 recurved styles.

Terminal umbels of 2-9 flowers.

Fruit:

Dark purplish black berry, 0.6-1.2 cm in diameter.

Ripens in September.

Can be confused with:

Trientalis borealis, Starflower, which has only one tier of whorled leaves.

Geographic range:

Type specimen location: Along creek valley path.

State: Throughout lower peninsula and eastern half of upper.

Regional: Quebec to Minnesota, south to Florida and Iowa.



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Habitat:

Local: Riparian.

Regional: "Usually in moist or swampy woods...less often in oak or pine woods."

Voss 1972, p.405.

Common local companions:

Starflower, maples, and pine.

Usages:

Human: For Native Americans the rhizome was a minor source of food, reportedly tasting cucumber-like, and used medicinally: various dried plant parts were prepared as an infusion given to colicky babies and to adults as a mild diuretic (Millspaugh 1892, 1974).

Why is it called *that*?

Medeola: "Because of its medicinal properties" (Smith 1966) it was supposedly named for the mythical sorceress Medea. The genus name, *virginiana*, means "of Virginia", perhaps where the type specimen came from. Indian cucumber-root for the crisp texture and cucumber-like taste of the rhizome, and its usage by Native Americans as a vegetable.

Prepared by: Barbara Lukacs Grob December 2007