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### 110. HEXASTYLIS SPECIOSA

#### *Aristolochiaceae*

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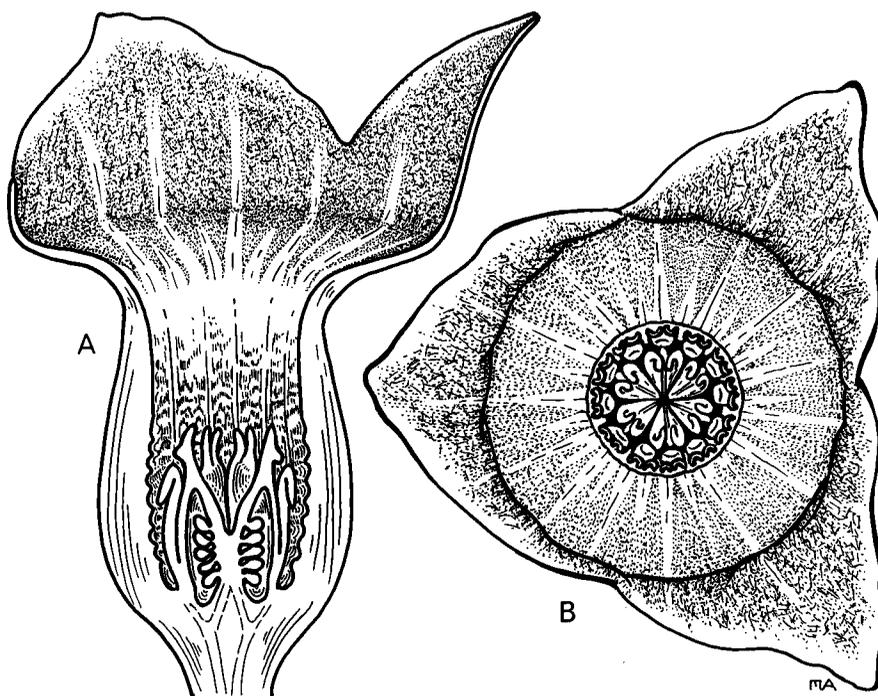
*Hexastylis* Raf. is a genus of 10 species of evergreen, creeping herbs belonging to the *Aristolochiaceae*, a primarily tropical family notable for its bizarre flowers. *Hexastylis*, while not possessing flowers of such singular form as those found in *Aristolochia*, can nevertheless boast some of the strangest blossoms of any temperate plant. In recent years there has been an increase in interest shown towards compact, out of the ordinary but easily grown plants. *Hexastylis* species, aside from their often bizarre, not to say beautiful flowers, possess handsome foliage and are both small and easy to grow. Although the hardiness of *H. speciosa* has yet to be proven, almost all of the remaining species are happy outdoors in southern England. All they require to succeed is a well-drained acid soil and light overhead shade.

*Hexastylis* is closely related to *Asarum* L. and indeed some botanists consider that they belong to the same genus. At one time *Asarum* consisted of a large number of both Old and New World species. However, current taxonomic thinking favours several smaller genera. The features used to maintain these segregate taxa are rather numerous but could, nevertheless, be regarded as somewhat trivial. In the case of the genus under discussion it is the separate styles, superior to partly inferior ovary, lack of vestigial petals, rounded to blunt calyx-lobes and single, glabrous, coriaceous, evergreen leaves that distinguish it from *Asarum*. The latter has fused styles, an inferior ovary, vestigial petals,  $\pm$  attenuated calyx-lobes and rather thin, deciduous leaves borne in pairs. With no complete, modern revision available, it seems preferable to maintain *Hexastylis*, at least for the

time being. Furthermore, the amalgamation of *Hexastylis* with *Asarum* would necessitate combining several *Hexastylis* names with *Asarum* for the first time. To do this without proper research, is undesirable.

In the United States *Hexastylis* species are called 'heartleaves', in allusion to the leaf shape. Almost all of the species are found in woodland areas, often near to streams or on raised ground in swamps, at low to moderate altitudes. *Hexastylis* is restricted to the eastern seaboard.

CULTIVATION. The plant of *Hexastylis speciosa* at Kew is grown under frost-free conditions in a gritty, leafy soil. Due to the plants' deep-rooted nature a clay long-tom pot is used, the pot being stood on a capillary bed. Rain water is applied throughout the year, but rather less is given from late summer until repotting takes place in early spring. As with many North American plants, *H. speciosa* is



**Hexastylis speciosa.** A, half-flower,  $\times 3$ ; B, flower from above,  $\times 3$ .



*Hexastylis speciosa*

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unaffected by lime, but seems intolerant of the additives in London water (Tony Hall, pers. comm.). During winter the plant receives plenty of light, but very light shading is used during summer to prevent scorch. It has been found that by growing members of this group in good light, pests such as greenfly and red spider are discouraged. However, scale insect is occasionally a problem but is easily eradicated with an appropriate pesticide. *Hexastylis speciosa* may be hardy outdoors, but as it is slow to increase and has not as yet set seed at Kew, outdoor cultivation has not been attempted.

**DESCRIPTION.** *Evergreen, aromatic, creeping herb*, 15–20 cm high. *Leaves* produced singly but congested, arising from a slender, fleshy, short-branching rhizome; lamina cordate, 4–6 cm long, 5–7.5 cm wide, with a wide sinus and pronounced rounded basal lobes, these about one third as long as the lamina, the apex rounded to subacute, the whole surface mid-green with faint paler variegation between the principal veins above, paler, faintly tinged brownish crimson beneath; petioles slender, terete, 8–14 cm long, crimson-brown basally, shading to pale green distally, puberulous. *Inflorescence* solitary, axillary, adpressed to the ground, produced in late spring. *Peduncle* short, curved, approximately the same length as the flower, yellowish cream streaked with dark crimson, glabrous. *Perianth* cream, minutely streaked and spotted with maroon externally, but internally bright green in the throat, deep crimson above, margined with pale cream, with pale, irregular, longitudinal stripes from the throat to half way up the lobes, 2.5–3 cm long, cup-shaped below, abruptly expanding above, glabrous outside, pubescent inside; lobes spreading, broadly triangular, sub-acute, 4–8 mm long, 6–8 mm wide. *Corona* green. *Stamens* 12, arranged in 6 pairs, 1.5–2 mm long, pale green. *Styles* 6, 2–3 mm long, extending above the ovoid stigma, 2-fid, mid-green.

**DISTRIBUTION.** South-eastern USA: Alabama; Autauga, Chilton and Elmore Counties, endemic; occurring in open pine-deciduous forest in well-drained sandy loam above acid streams and bogs at low altitudes.

***Hexastylis speciosa*** Harper in *Torrey* 24(5): 77–83 (1924); Blomquist in *Brittonia* 8(4): 270 (1957); Gaddy in *Castanea* 52(3): 191 (1987). Type: USA, c. 2 miles east of Booth, Autauga Co., Alabama, *Harper and Holt* s.n., 18 May 1924 (lectotype selected by Blomquist in *Brittonia* 8(4): 270 (1957) NY; isolectotypes PA, US).