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In Season

IN SEASON

Mukdenia rossii: Tiny shade lover provides spring blooms

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April 9, 2010

It is always rewarding to see sprite little plants shining in the gray ankle-high dimensions we rarely pay attention to. Mukdenia is just one of those little plants.



Mukdenia rossii is a plant I picked up several years ago when I was the horticulture manager of The Oregon Garden. Dan Heims of Terra Nova Nurseries shared it with me.

This diminutive, semi-herbaceous plant is found in Korea and ranges to China. It rarely is seen growing in this country. It's surprising considering it is quite hardy, down to Zone 4 (minus 30 degrees).

The Genus name for this plant used to be Aceriphyllum, which literally means maplelike leaf. Indeed, the leaves do look like a miniature maple, and true to that genus moniker, they turn crimson in the fall. Quite beautiful.

Right now they are putting on their flower show. Twelve-inch stems culminate in milky-white clusters of flowers that positively illuminate the ground-level zone of your shade garden.

Mukdenia foliage can get to be 8 inches across. Mine have yet to exceed 4 inches. It spreads very slowly by rhizomes and combines well with other shade to partial shade lovers such as pulmonaria, heuchera and hellebores.

It does need even moisture, so the more sun exposure, the more you'll have to supply moisture. While moisture is needed, avoid standing water at all costs.

Over the last eight years, I have seen the best results in shady sites. So find a shady site, provide even moisture, give little to no fertilizer and enjoy. This truly is a plant that isn't used enough.

If you have trouble finding it at your local nursery, get online for sources and lots of images. Mukdenia rossii 'Crimson Fans' from Terra Nova has foliage that emerges green and is tinged red after flowering time for the rest of the summer. Awesome.

— Al Shay, consulting horticulturist, baxtersnoo@yahoo.com



OSU EXTENSION SERVICE

With maplelike leaves that turn crimson in the fall and milky-white clusters of flowers in the spring, this little plant packs a punch.

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