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Meehania cordata:

A Great Ground Cover for the Landscape

Barry Glick

When Thomas Meehan, a Philadelphia botanist, died in 1901, I'm sure he went to the big forest in the sky feeling proud that Nathaniel Lord Britton (1859–1934), named a genus of plants in his honor. I'd also bet that he didn't know how wonderful his namesake plant was.

In fact, most people don't know how wonderful *Meehania cordata* (Nutt.) Britt. (Lamiaceae) is.

Charles and Martha Oliver are proprietors of the Primrose Path Nursery in Scottdale, Pennsylvania, and dear friends of mine. I'd noticed *Meehania cordata* listed in their catalog. After reading their description and hearing them extol the virtues about how charming this little plant was, I asked them to please bring me one on their upcoming visit. I had requested one the year before, but it always seemed they were sold out. So I was emphatic that I must have one, and intimated should they not bring me one, they may end up sleeping in my barn that chilly autumn night.

Saxifragaceae (*Tiarella* L., *Heuchera* L., and *Heucherella* L.) are the main focus of their breeding work, so we had planned a day of *Tiarella* hunting in Wolfpen Hollow, a hauntingly mysterious woodland area near my farm. We'd just descended a summit into the foggy creekbottom when I heard Charles laughing hysterically behind me on the trail. I turned to see what he found so amusing and saw him pointing to the ground. There, all around him, the ground was covered with Meehan's mint.

Abstract

Meehania cordata (Nutt.) Britton (Lamiaceae) is an easily propagated member of the mint family. With its growth habit, heart shaped leaves, and spring flowers, Meehan's mint has potential as a ground cover, particularly in deep shade locations within the landscape.

KEYWORDS: creeping mint, trailing mint, Meehan's mint, cuttings, propagation

NOMENCLATURE: ITIS (1998)

Talk about getting caught not practicing what you preach—I tell everyone during my lectures on native plants to "look in your own backyard!" Well, after I recovered from my initial embarrassment, we looked further and found the entire west facing slope of the hill down to the creekbed was a veritable carpet of dark, almost glossy green, cordate (heart-shaped, hence the specific epithet *cordata*) leaves, vining over rocks and decaying tree limbs in the deep shade of hemlocks and oaks.

I took some cuttings not knowing whether they would root so late in the season, but I had a gut feeling of optimism. Sure enough, they rooted in a matter of weeks.

The following spring, I checked in on the population and found that the new growth was thick and lovely. In June, I went back to observe the flowers and found a sea of lilac, pink and lavender trumpet-like blooms at the tips of the stems (Figure 1). The delicate 2.5-cm-long (1-in) flowers reminded me very much of *Scutellaria* L., another member of Lamiaceae and close relative of *Meehania*.

In my garden, now having many plants from the rooted cuttings that I overwintered under a dark bench

Figure 1 • Meehania cordata *blooming in the woods of West Virginia.*

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in a poly tunnel (another testament to the virtues of *Meehania* is how deep a shade it thrives in), I planted them under a small grove of lilacs and viburnums. They responded to the rich humus that had accumulated under these older shrubs and almost immediately started to wind their way around on the ground. However, unlike other Lamiaceae, *Meehania cordata* is non-invasive.

Taxonomically, *Meehania cordata* is a member of the Lamiaceae (Mint) family. In North America, *Meehania cordata* is a monotypic species in the genus. Its reported range is from southwest Pennsylvania to North Carolina and northeast Tennessee. It is listed as "threatened" in the later 2 states. The heart-shaped leaves are on the small side, averaging 2.5 to 3.8 cm (1 to 1.5 in) wide at the petiole and about 2.5 cm (1 in) long. *Meehania* grows 15 to 20 cm (6 to 8 in) tall. I suspect that it is hardy to zone 4, maybe even 3.

I take about a 7.5-cm-long (3 in) cutting, dip it in 10% Wood's Rooting Compound [1.0% indolebutyric acid (IBA) and 0.5% naphthaleneacetic acid (NAA)] without any apparent alcohol sensitivity, and bury at least 2 nodes in a 3:1 pine bark:perlite rooting medium. Without bottom heat but with mist, 100% rooting occurs in 6 to 8 wk. I suspect the same rate of rooting would occur without misting. Rooted cuttings are transplanted into 160-ml, 6.25-cm-deep pots (2-in "bandpots") filled with a 4:2:1:1 composted pine bark:peat moss:perlite:vermiculite medium. Plants are fertilized once every 4 to 6 wk with Peters Peat-Lite Special (15N:16P_2O_5:17K_2O) at 375 ppm N (1 tbsp/gal). Plants are ready for sale in about 1 y.

Meehania cordata is one of the best plants I can think of for those dark and foreboding corners of the garden where there isn't enough light for most other plants. Even if it didn't have the added benefit of those really bright colorful flowers, I would recommend it as a very useful groundcover.

Reference

[ITIS] Integrated Taxonomic Information System. 1998. Biological names. Version 4.0 (on-line database). URL: http://www.itis.usda.gov/plantproj/itis/itis_query.html (updated 15 December 1998).

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