

A Tiara for the Garden

Everyone gravitates to plants when they display beautiful flowers. For the non-gardener, once the flowers fade, so often fades any interest in the plant as well. However, for the dedicated gardener, flowers are only part of a plant's lure; foliage, form and a stout ease of culture fill out a gardener's checklist for garden worthy plants. *Tiarella* or Foam Flower not only has a wonderfully attractive spring floral display, but it also fulfills those remaining needs of a gardener's checklist!

A member of the Saxifragaceae or Saxifrage Family, the various species of *Tiarella* are found



throughout Asia and North America. The genus name was originally penned by Carl Linnaeus (1707-1758) in 1753, derived from the Greek *Tiara*, meaning turban or crown – a reference to the shape of the seed capsules. For the garden, *Tiarella cordifolia* is a very garden worthy species. The species epithet, yet again crafted by Linnaeus, is reflective of the cordate or heart-shaped foliage. Native to the

woodlands stretching from Nova Scotia to Alabama and west to Minnesota, the 2-4" diameter foliage has 3-7 shallow lobes and is slightly hirsute.

Growing to 6-8" tall, the foliage often displays extensive and attractive variations in red markings along the veins! Come autumn, the foliage assumes a bronzy-red color and typically persists throughout the winter. For the non-gardener, the plant also produces flowers! From late April through early June, the plants produce 6-12" inch tall leafless stalks, along which the uppermost 2-3" are adorned with small white flowers, as seen in the photograph above of *Tiarella cordifolia* 'Running Tapestry'. The flowers are often pink in bud, opening to white, 5 petaled flowers from which 10 anthers prominently project, giving the overall flower not only a foamy appearance, but its common name! *Tiarella cordifolia* is also known for its ability to produce 3-6" long stolons or runners, allowing it to be a worthy groundcover.



Oddly, although Linnaeus first described the plant in 1753, little additional focus was given to the species until the 1930's when *Tiarella wherryi* was described by botanist Olga Korhoven Lakela (1890-1980) at the University of Minnesota. Honoring the botanist and mineralogist Edgare Theodor Wherry (1885-1982) who first found the plant in the southern regions of the Appalachian Mountains, this species is not stoloniferous and is clump forming. Also, not only the buds, but the flowers of this species are blushed pink. Currently, there is debate as to whether this is truly a distinct species or merely a subspecies of *Tiareella cordifolia*. Regardless, most nurseries now lump plants which are clump forming under *Tiareella wherryi* and those with stolons under its cousin.



Clearly, a plant with such a dramatic variation in leaf and flower color, as well as habit, will have the potential for numerous selections. Pictured on the left is one of my favorites named 'Running Tapestry', which exhibits leaves with deep red mottling along the veins and vigorous stolons, making it a great groundcover candidate. 'Candy Striper' is another fun selection with deeply incised leaves and flowers that are strongly pink in bud and light pink in flower. A clump forming selection that I have

used in years past is 'Oakleaf', which also displays pink flowers with foliage resembling that of a White Oak.

Foam Flower is a phenomenal plant for the shade. The rather coarse foliage looks great mixed with finer foliaged plants such as the Woodland Phlox (*Phlox stolonifera*), Crested Iris (*Iris cristata*), ferns or even broad-leafed selections of Hosta! Flourishing in well-drained and humus rich soils, this Tiara of the Garden is more than worthy of every woodland garden!