

ARALIA HISPIDA Vent.
Bristly Sarsaparilla

FAMILY: Araliaceae

HABIT: Perennial herb or semi-woody shrub to 1 m. from a stout rhizome; flowering June-August; fruiting July-September.

SIMILAR SPECIES: Young plants of *Aralia spinosa* might possibly be mistaken for this species. However, *A. spinosa* bears stout spines; *A. hispida* merely has simple bristles.

TOTAL RANGE: Nfld. and s. Lab. to Man., s. to N.S., NY, PA, WV, OH, IN, IL, and MN.

STATE RANGE: ASHTABULA CO: Post-1980 records are from Geauga and Lake counties. There are pre-1980 occurrence records from Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Licking, Lorain, Tuscarawas and Wayne counties.

HABITAT: A great variety of open to semi-open habitats, usually in sandy or sterile soils; often in extremely disturbed situations; clearings, rocky woods, tops of cliffs, sand dunes, recently-burned areas, even freshly bulldozed early (see Voss, 1985).

HAZARDS: Overshading by woody species due to succession.

RECOVERY POTENTIAL: Presumed very good due to its tolerance of disturbance.

INVENTORY GUIDELINES: Mature flowering or fruiting material is best for positive identification.

COMMENTS: Bristly sarsaparilla formerly was widespread over northeastern Ohio. Presumably this species increased in abundance following deforestation and the resulting disturbance of the environment. However, it quickly decreased in frequency. This decline may be related to stabilization of habitat. Riddell (1836) described *Aralia hispida* from Little Mountain on the Geauga-Lake counties line. The cluster of records cited above indicates that this species may have been locally common in that area. It's significant that the only extant Ohio population of *A. hispida* grows on a detached knob of Little Mountain. Because of the weedy nature of this species, it's difficult to determine if this population is indigenous. Bristly sarsaparilla at this site grows in close proximity to populations of *Rhododendron maximum*, *Leucothea recurva* and other Appalachian species that are known to have been planted here. It is conceivable that seeds or rootstalks of *A. hispida* were transported inadvertently with these introduced species. However, it is equally likely that this population of bristly sarsaparilla is natural, given the historical records cited above. It probably is impossible to know with certainty whether or not this extant population of *Aralia hispida* is indigenous or introduced, but the majority of the botanists visiting the site believe it should be treated as an indigenous population.

SELECTED REFERENCES:

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