

Wildflower in Focus

Text by Melanie Choukas-Bradley
Artwork by Tina Thieme Brown

Cut-leaved Toothwort (Cut-leaved Pepperrout)

Dentaria laciniata Muhl. ex Willd. (*Cardamine concatenata*)
Mustard Family (*Brassicaceae*)



Cut-leaved toothwort is a wildflower that grows in abundance in many parts of Maryland, blooming in concert with spring beauty, trout-lily, Virginia bluebells, bloodroot and other spring ephemerals. This wildflower is in the mustard family, which is characterized by four-parted flowers (an earlier scientific name - *cruciferae* - referred to the cross-shaped corolla) and distinctive fruit, which is either a long, thin pod-like "silique" or an often shorter, wider and flattened "silicle." In addition to many wildflowers, the family includes broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage and the plant from which the condiment mustard is extracted.

Flowers: Small, four-petaled, +- 1" across; white, pink or lavender, in small upright terminal cluster.

Leaves: Opposite or whorled, simple or compound; usually there is a whorl of three leaves beneath the flower cluster. Leaves are deeply, palmately cut into several long, thin lobes or leaflets, with toothed or untoothed margins. Overall leaf 2 - 5" across, petioled.

Fruit: Thin, beaked silique, 1 - 2" long (including beak), present with or after the flowers.

Height and Growth Habit: 6 - 15"; upright.

Habitat and Range: Moist rich woods; Maine, Quebec and Minnesota south to Florida, Louisiana and Oklahoma.

Herbal Lore: According to longtime MNPS board member and former president Karyn Molines: "Interestingly - 'toothwort' comes from the 'Doctrine of Signatures,' the belief that the plant provides signs (from God) of its medicinal value. The root had toothlike extensions so it was thought to cure toothaches. In his **Handbook of Northeastern Indian Medicinal Plants**, Dr. Jim Duke says toothwort species were used as such... 'Malecite: sedative, hoarseness. Cherokee: colds, sore throat. Algonquian: heart ailments, children's fever. Delaware: scrofula, stomach and venereal ailments. Mohawk: tuberculosis.'"

Similar Species: The leaves distinguish it from the less common slender toothwort (*D. heterophylla*), which, in addition to stem leaves, has a large three-leafleted basal leaf at blooming time. A third species, two-leaved toothwort (*D. diphylla*), can be found in the mountains.

Blooming Time: March - May.

Locations: Rock Creek Park and other stream valley parks of the Washington area; C&O Canal; Wheaton Regional Park; Little Bennett Regional Park; Patuxent River Park; Patapsco Valley State Park; Piney Run Park; Watkins Regional Park; Battle Creek Cypress Swamp Sanctuary; Sugarloaf and Catoctin Mountains; western mountains of Maryland.

"Wildflower in Focus" is adapted from **An Illustrated Guide to Eastern Woodland Wildflowers and Trees: 350 Plants Observed at Sugarloaf Mountain, Maryland** (Choukas-Bradley and Brown, University of Virginia Press, 2008).