



***Polygonatum pubescens* (Willd.) Pursh** **Solomon-seal**

Liliaceae (Lily Family)

Blooming season: May-June

Plant:

Arching, unbranched stem 30-60 cm long.
Single stem rises from rhizome with prominent scars from yearly growth.

Leaves:

Alternate, dark green, ovate tapering to sharp points.
Sessile, or very short petioles.
3-9 prominent veins, finely pubescent below. (May need hand lens.)
5-10 cm long, 1-5 cm wide.



Flower:

Yellow green or greenish white, 8-12 mm long.
Tubular, with 3 each petals and sepals joined, with spreading points.
Usually 1 or 2 flowers, but may be up to 4.
“Hanging on stalks that are sharply bent down” (Ricketts 1966, v. 1, p. 34).

Fruit:

Berry, dark blue or blue-black.
5 mm diameter.

Can be confused with: *Polygonatum biflora*, also called Solomon-seal, which is completely smooth, whose flowers hang from curved stalks and usually has 7-19 prominent leaf veins.
“Much of the older wildflower literature is confusing because the name *P. biflora* was once erroneously applied to what is now called *P. pubescens*.” (Voss 1972, p. 399).

Geographic range:

Type specimen location: Kasey Hartz Trail on the red maple/witch-hazel side.
State: Throughout.
Regional: Quebec to Manitoba, south to Maryland, Kentucky, Iowa, and in mountains south to South Carolina.



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Habitat:

Local: Creek bed up to red-maple-witch hazel habitat.

Regional: Woods and edges, also found in “open and dry” areas (Voss 1972 pp.398-9).

Tolerant of varied habitats.

Common local companions:

Indian cucumber, starflower, witch-hazel, and maple.

Usages:

Human: Native Americans used the root medicinally: in preparation of poultices for wounds and infections; making an eyewash; as an emetic (also the berries); for spitting up of blood; for treatment of lung problems (unspecified); and for headache treatment. The flowers and roots were used as snuff, and both the roots and young shoots were eaten as food.

Other animal: The plant requires insects for pollination. Birds eat the berries.

Why is it called *that*? *Polygonatum* is Greek for many jointed, referring either to the zigzag stems, or the multiple joints on the rhizome. *Pubescens* is Latin for fuzzy or hairy, referring to the hairs on the underneath side of the leaf veins. The common name, Solomon-seal, is probably a reference to the stem scars on the rhizome, taken to resemble the impression of King Solomon’s seal.

Prepared by: Barbara Lukacs Grob April 2008