

Eco-Friendly Native Plant of the Month

MAY 2017

NC NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

REEDY CREEK NATURE PRESERVE

Photos by Will Stuart



Black Swallowtail butterfly



Zizia aurea Golden Alexanders

Year-round Benefits

Golden Alexanders may be uncommon to home gardeners, but are quickly becoming a plant you must have. They are quite easy to grow and have the benefit of having a basal clump of divided evergreen leaves during mild winters that are attractive all year round. This native plant appears to be one of the more deer resistant species for the Piedmont and is often one of the first wildflowers to bloom.

Landscape Uses

Because the yellow flowers are tiny, it is best to plant several *Zizia aurea* in a group or mass. Golden Alexanders are similar to their more commonly



Black Swallowtail caterpillar, photo by Larry Mellichamp

known European cousins used as herbs, namely dill and fennel.

They are happy in full sun or part shade and in damp soil, and can tolerate drought once established. Typically 1-2 feet tall, Golden Alexanders mix well on the meadow's edge with Robin's-plantain (*Erigeron pulchellus*),

Wild Geranium (*Geranium maculatum*), Downy Phlox (*Phlox pilosa*), Virginia Bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*) and Indian-pink (*Spigelia marilandica*).

Eco-benefits

Golden Alexanders are a larval host plant of Black Swallowtail butterflies. Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation notes that *Zizia aurea* has special value as a plant that attracts a large number of native

bees, and hosts beneficial insects that prey upon pest insects. Because Golden Alexanders are in the carrot family (think dill, parsley, parsnips) they are nice to have in the garden when you see the swallowtail caterpillars devouring your herbs. Simply relocate the very hungry caterpillar to your *Zizia aurea* patch. To learn more about the life cycle of swallowtail butterflies visit xerces.org or Butterflies and Moths of North America (butterfliesandmoths.org)

Native uses and history

Traditionally both Native Americans and early colonists used Golden Alexanders for medicinal purposes including treating fever and healing wounds. However, like many members of this family, parts of the roots and leaves are toxic and should be treated with caution.

For more Eco and Bird Friendly pages visit: ncwildflower.org ncnpssouthernpiedmont.wordpress.com
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