

WATER ARUM; WILD CALLA

Calla palustris L.

ARUM FAMILY

"Yes, though you may think me perverse, if it were proposed to me to dwell in the neighborhood of the most beautiful garden that ever human art contrived, or else of a Dismal Swamp, I should certainly decide for the swamp."—Thoreau.

If you feel in any measure the fascination of these so-called waste places, as did the philosopher of Walden, you will some day in your rambles come upon a colony of Water Arums. It is likely to be in a little pool in the bog or on the margin of the swamp. The dark masses of smooth, heart-shaped leaves should serve as identification. If in doubt, look for long, creeping rootstalks, with white fibrous roots at the joints. If not yet satisfied, break a rootstalk and taste the juice, but very delicately, for it has an acrid bite. In early Summer the flowers make such experiments unnecessary, as you at once recognize a humble relation of the stately calla lily of the greenhouse.

The flowers proper are small, consisting of stamens and pistil only, and are compactly arranged around the top of the stem into a fleshy spike, called the spadix. Below this is a thick, pointed bract, the spathe, white on the inner surface, greenish on the outside. This snowy banner behind the inconspicuous spike serves to attract insects, who unconsciously aid in fertilization as they crawl over the flowers and pass from plant to plant. By late Summer the spadix has developed into a large, knotty head of bright red berries, containing hard, smooth seeds surrounded by a jelly-like pulp.