Arisaema triphyllum (L.) Schott
Family ARACEAE
Jack-in-the-Pulpit
A RHODE ISLAND NATIVE PLANT
by Gilbert George & Irene Stuckey

The native wild plant Jack-in-the-Pulpit makes an imposing plant in our spring
gardens and woods, with its large green three-parted leaves and its interesting
spathe and spadix. The spathe is a large bract, or modified leaf that encloses the
flower head. Sometimes, as in Jack-in-the-pulpit, the spathe is colorful and
conspicuous, but it may also be papery as in members of the onion family. The
spadix is a fleshy axis that bears clusters of stalkless flowers, and often in the arum
family, which includes Jack-in-the-Pulpit, has a club-like apex. In Jack-in-the-
Pulpit, male flowers are borne on the exposed upper end of the club-like spadix
and the female flowers on the lower end that is completely enclosed by the spadix.

In Rhode Island our plants are Arisaema triphyllum ssp. triphyllum, ssp. pusillum (Peck) Huttleston, and ssp. stewardsonii (Britt.) Huttleston. The three
subspecies may hybridize and are frequently difficult to identify accurately. The
most conspicuous differences are as follows:

1) subspecies triphyllum: Plants are 12 to 36 inches tall, leaves usually pale
on the lower surface, the two lateral leaflets strongly equal with the lower side
rounded and the upper acute. The tube of the spathe is purple or green and usually
striped, but rarely corrugated. Plants grow in moist to dry soil, in Rhode Island
blooming from mid-May to early June. Common.

2) subspecies pusillum: Plants are smaller than (1), rarely more than 12
inches tall. Leaves green on both sides, lateral leaflets acute at base on both sides,
tube of spathe not corrugated, purple or green, not striped above. Blooms in mid-May
in Rhode Island, grows in moist but not wet soil. Uncommon.

3) subspecies stewardsonii: Plants midway in height between other
subspecies, leaves green on both sides. Lateral leaflets have acute angles on both
sides; tube of spathe strongly corrugated with white ribs, and in Rhode Island usually
green, but purple forms are found. Grows in wet soil, often in standing water;
usually does not bloom until late May or June, and at times even
in July. Less common than ssp. triphyllum but more common
than ssp. pusillum.

The Jack-in-the-Pulpit usually can be found growing
in wet to moist soil, often with skunk cabbage
Symlocarpus foetidus) and other wetland plants,
under tall deciduous trees. The soil is acid and rich in
humus. The trick to growing any of our native plants
is to closely duplicate the conditions in which they
are found growing naturally, in the wild. As with
most native plants, this still leaves the gardener
with plenty of latitude for growing Jacks. They
are found growing under high shade, but will
grow in the sun, although the whole plant
will be paler. They cannot be grown in the
shade of evergreens, since they need more
sun for growth than is found under
evergreen trees. The Jack-in-the-Pulpit
is primarily a spring wild plant, but the red
fruit is also interesting in late summer
and fall, after all the leaves have fallen.

Illustration by RIWPS member Martha Marshall
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Jack-in-the-Pulpit  
Family ARACEAE

CULTIVATION NOTES

Arisaema triphyllum (L.) Schott  
Jack-in-the-Pulpit

Perennial. Blooms late April-early July. Found in rich woods to wet swamps & bogs. Height 1-3'.

Seed Collection
Collect seeds when the fruit is bright red and has not fallen. Rub the pulp off the seeds, between paper or cloth. You can see if the seeds are viable by immersing them in water; inviable seeds with float to the top and should be discarded.

Propagation from Seed
Do not allow the seeds to dry out, but plant them immediately one-quarter inch deep in a flat of moistened soil. Cover with milled sphagnum moss, to prevent damp-off. Moisten the sphagnum with a mister and place the flat in a plastic bag, and place in the crisper of the refrigerator to stratify for three months. The seeds can also be planted outdoors immediately, or in a cold frame. Germination is much better, however, using the indoor techniques.
After stratification, place the flat on top of the refrigerator to germinate. When the true leaves form, pot each plant individually and grow them in a well-lit spot such as a window sill. The plants will develop a corn in the first season. The second year they should flower. They can be planted outdoors in a special bed or directly into the wildflower garden. In either case, add compost or well-rotted leaves to amend the soil before planting. They will grow well with normal watering.

Personal Notes

References