



# CULTIVATION NOTES

## #20

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### Foamflower

*Tiarella cordifolia* L.

A New England Native Plant

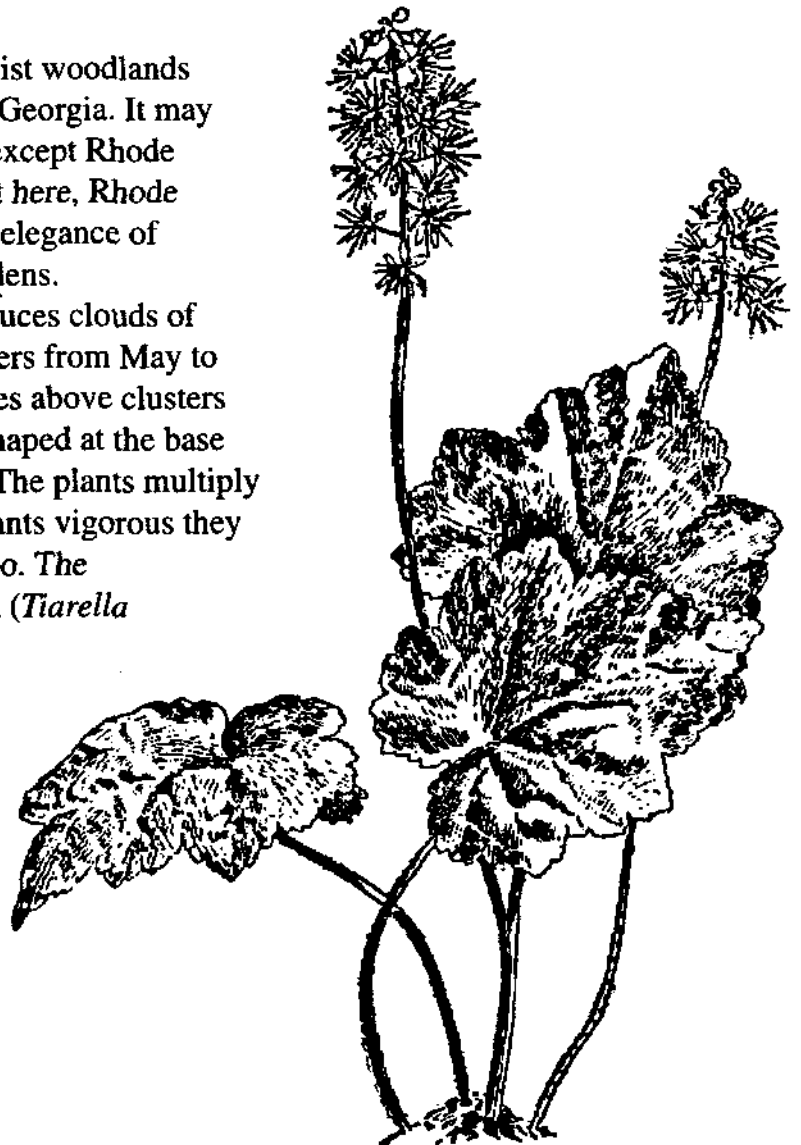
Family SAXIFRAGACEAE

by Carolyn Curtis

*Tiarella* in Latin means a little tiara or turban, which refers to the form of the pistil. Foamflower has other interesting common names, including Coolwort (which probably refers to its medicinal uses) and Gemfruit. Native Americans made a leaf tea to use as a mouthwash and for eye ailments, and the roots were used in teas as a diuretic, to treat diarrhea, and to loosen phlegm. Poultices of the root were also used on wounds.

This plant may be found in rich, moist woodlands from Nova Scotia to Ontario, south to Georgia. It may be found in every New England state except Rhode Island. Although it is not a native plant here, Rhode Island gardeners are rediscovering the elegance of *Tiarella cordifolia* for their shade gardens.

Foamflower is a perennial that produces clouds of small, feathery white star-shaped flowers from May to June, on racemes rising about six inches above clusters of leaves. The hairy leaves are heart-shaped at the base and have five to seven shallow lobes. The plants multiply from spreading stolons; to keep the plants vigorous they should be divided every two years or so. The groundcover (*Tiarella wherryi*) Lakela (*Tiarella cordifolia* L. var. *collina* Wherryi) is a southern variety (it grows in Virginia) lacking stolons; it is sometimes available at RIWPS plant sales.



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*Tiarella cordifolia* L. Foamflower

**Perennial:** In May and June white starry flowers are borne in profusion on erect racemes. Buds may be faintly tinged with pink. The young leaves are green and the root leaves are bronze. *Tiarella* is perfect for the rich, moist humusy soil of the shade or semi-shade woodland garden and especially memorable when seen in sizable colonies. Soil with pH 5-6 is ideal, but the plant will tolerate soil with pH 4.5-7. Slugs are apt to devour some of the leaves but I find that the deer pose the biggest problem.

**Propagation from divisions:** Divide the runners in the spring or fall by simply cutting the stolon and gently digging it up. Be careful not to disturb the newly formed white roots. Set the crowns even with the soil surface and plant the divisions about 12" apart. Keep the newly planted crowns well watered until they become established. Not only is this an easy way to increase your *Tiarella* colony, I believe it is essential for continued vigor of the planting.

**Propagation from seed:** Using your favorite seed starting mix, sterilize at 200 degrees F. for 45 minutes in a Reynolds Oven Bag. Do not punch holes in the bag.

**Method I:** October through February. Sow seed that has been collected from mature fruits in dampened media and cover with a thin layer of the mix. Water and place in an unheated greenhouse or cold frame away from sun and protected from rodents. Keep moist but not too wet. Germination will take place in the spring.

**Method II:** March through September. Sow seed in sterilized medium and cover with a thin layer of the mix. Water and allow to drain thoroughly. Seal in a plastic bag and place the container in the refrigerator for 3 to 4 weeks. Place the container in a cold frame or shady area. Remove the plastic bag and protect with a screen. Do not allow to dry out. Transplant seedlings when they are large enough to handle.

**Companions:** *Trillium erectum*, *Phlox divaricata*, *Sanguinaria canadensis*, and roses.

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**Illustration** from Mrs. Dana's *How to Know the Wildflowers*, Dover Publications, Inc., NY.