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**Wildflower Spot – January 2011**  
John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

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## PUTTY-ROOT ORCHID

*Aplectrum hyemale*

By Helen Hamilton, *President of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*

Putty-root Orchid is easily found in the leaf litter or snow cover in winter as a single large oval leaf. Appearing in late summer, each corrugated leaf is uniquely pin-striped, with parallel silvery-white veins alternating with green stripes. No leaf is visible in late May or early June, when a flower stalk emerges, carrying several small purplish-green blossoms.

This orchid grows in rich deciduous woods and moist soil in most counties of Virginia, and the eastern half of United States and Canada. It is found in calcareous ravines in the Coastal Plain. Putty-root Orchid will spread underground through the growth of its tubers, forming large colonies.

*Aplectrum* comes from the Latin, meaning that the flowers are “without spurs.” The species name *hyemale* means “winter” and refers to the fact that this orchid has a solitary leaf that persists all winter. The plant is also called Adam and Eve.



The common name refers to a mucilaginous substance which can be removed from the tubers when they are crushed. The sticky substance was used to mend broken crockery by early settlers, and by Native Americans for medicinal purposes. ❖

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**Photo:** Putty-root Orchid (*Aplectrum hyemale*) taken by Helen Hamilton  
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