**Houttuynia cordata** C.P. Thunberg

**Other Common Names:** Chameleon Plant, Giap Ca, Heartleaf.

**Family:** Saururaceae.

**Cold Hardiness:** Houttuynia is useful in USDA zones 5(4) to 8.

**Foliage:** Evergreen, semi-evergreen, or deciduous; alternate; simple; cordate; blades 2Oto 3Olong; bases are entire and the tips are acute to acuminate; the five main veins are palmate; margins are entire; leaf are aromatic, foliage is variously described as “orange-like” to “evil-smelling” when crushed; blades of the species type are dark green flushed red along the margins, but variegated cultivars with splotches or stripes of green, white, cream, pink, to red are the most commonly encountered form in the nursery trade; stipules are prominent at the base of the petioles; petioles are thick, half to nearly as long as the blade; leaves may take on a yellow to red coloration in the fall.

**Flower:** Inflorescences are small, ½Oto 1Olong, dense spikes surrounded by four ½Olong white involucral bracts with a tiny individual bract subtending each yellow-green flower; usually hidden by the foliage, flowers are not particularly ornamental, except on ‘Flore Pleno’ which has much larger involucral bracts than the species type; flowers occur in late spring to early summer.

**Fruit:** Fruit are in dry spikes about 2Olong; not ornamental and partially hidden by the foliage.

**Stem / Bark:** Stems — green; glabrous; rather sparsely branched; Buds — foliose; green; Bark — not applicable.

**Habit:** These evergreen herbaceous perennials grow 6Oto 12 Q24Q tall with an indefinite spread from slow creeping rhizomes; plants are medium-coarse in texture.

**Cultural Requirements:** Plants should be located in full sun to partial shade; although *H. cordata* spreads excessively in favorable locations, plants must be grown in steadily moist to boggy soils; plants are not tolerant of dry sites and decline in the summer heat of warmer portions of our region; this species is not soil specific as long as it is wet; if the foliage becomes ratty, plantings can be mown to remove old foliage and encourage new growth.

**Pathological Problems:** Although seldom of consequence where plants are well adapted, aphids, slugs, and leaf spots can be occasional problems.

**Ornamental Assets:** The variegation pattern on some cultivars of this species is very showy; the species type and variegated cultivars both have modest levels of coarseness that add a pleasing textural contrast to finer foliaged plants.

**Limitations & Liabilities:** Plants tend to decline in the heat of summer in warmer portions of our region and on drier sites; conversely it tends to become highly invasive in more favorable locations; if it is well adapted to the site, it is likely to become a weed problem.

**Landscape Utilization:** Probably the best use of this plant is as a naturalized groundcover for wet sites in northern portions of our region; if one must try this plant in mixed plantings, it should be placed in an area where the rhizomes can be easily confined.

**Other Comments:** The shoots are traditionally eaten as vegetables in Southeast Asia; this genus’ name honors the 18th century Dutch naturalist and physician Maarten Houtuyn; the specific epithet alludes to the heart-shaped leaves.

**Native Habitat:** Mountainous regions of Southeast Asia and Japan.

**Related Taxa:** The species type is seldom sold in our regional trade; variegated cultivars, particularly common is the cultivar ‘Chameleon’ (‘Variegata’), which is known as Chameleon Plant due to its showy multi-colored green, white, cream, and red variegated leaves.
Saururus cernuus L.  
Lizard's-Tail  
(Saururus chinensis, Saururus loureiri, Saururus lucidus, Saururopsis chinensis, Spathium chinense)

This species is also known as American Swamp Lily, Swamp Lily or Water-Dragon; this evergreen herbaceous perennial water or bog garden species grows 3N to 5N tall with an indefinite spread from rhizomes; the aromatic leaves are ovate to cordate, 4O to 6O long by 2O to 4O wide, with palmate impressed main veins; inflorescences are 6O to 10O(12O) long erect spikes with nodding tips of fragrant densely packed white to creamy white flowers, hence the common name of Lizard's-Tail.

Lizard's-Tail has unique flowers, but is invasive in wet sites; plants will tolerate shallow water to boggy sites; adventitious roots are frequently present on the lower portions of the stems; Lizard's-Tail will grown in USDA zones 4 to 11; use in cultivated landscapes with care as it readily grows out of control.

The genus name of this North American native is derived from the Greek words for lizard, sauros, and tail, oura, in reference to the flower spike; the specific epithet means nodding, also alluding to the flower spikes.


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