

HAIRY WICKY

by David W. Hall

Hairy wicky is a small shrub closely related to mountain laurel. Its flowers are just as attractive as mountain laurel but about half the size.

Hairy wicky, *Kalmia hirsuta* Walt., is in the Heath Family (Ericaceae). *Kalmia* was named for Pehr Kalm, a Finnish botanist who traveled extensively in North America during the mid-1700s. *Hirsuta* is a Latin word describing the long stiff hairs covering the plant.

The native range of this species is along the Coastal Plain from southeastern South Carolina to southeastern Louisiana. In Florida it extends south in the peninsula to about Ocala in Marion County, and occurs in pine flatwoods, wet pinelands, and sandhills.

The growth habit is a small shrub to two feet tall from a hard base below ground. The numerous stems and evergreen leaves are covered with stiff hairs. The leaves vary in shape, mostly oval to elliptic, and are small, 3/16 to 5/8 of an inch long, and 1/16 to



5/16 of an inch wide with almost no stalk. Leaf margins are slightly incurved underneath.

Flowers are solitary or in clusters of two to three on new growth. The flower stalks are hairy as is the rest of the plant, and range in length up to an inch long. The flower petals are various shades of pink to white. The bell-shaped flowers are over a half inch wide and have stamens in red pockets and a ring of red dots farther towards the center. The very tiny seeds are contained in capsules.

Propagation is by seeds or by cuttings of semi-hard wood. The seeds

can be sown on peat and kept moist by a plastic covering. Transplanting can be done by moving the hard underground base during the cold months, and is best accomplished by taking some soil with the base.

Growth is best in sands with a light organic content. Broken shade is preferred but full sun can be tolerated. This species shows best when used as a border along walks or in patios as an accent plant.

For a colorful show during the April through August blooming season, plant hairy wicky around your home or office.