

Houttuynia cordata 'Chamaeleon'

Story and photos by Soni Forsman

Some plants are grown for their flowers, others for foliage and a few for both. *Houttuynia cordata* 'Chamaeleon' is desired for its colorful heart-shaped foliage but it does grow a flower. The foliage is variegated in colors of red, green and white. The flower is a one-inch spike with four white bracts at the base, appearing in early summer.



Houttuynia cordata 'Chamaeleon'

Houttuynia grows from slender rhizomes and can become invasive in moist growing conditions. It is best to grow in containers. Considered hardy to zone 5, sometimes zone 4, it can be held over the winter mulched into a perennial garden or just buried in a pile of leaves. It grows to a height of about 12-inches.

This is not a fussy plant. It will grow in full or part sun, in moist conditions, dry and even slightly submerged in water. Full sun gives the best foliage color and a moist growing medium is preferred. It is a ground cover and can be found at garden centers with the ground covers or with the aquatic plants.

This is a nice foliage plant to combine with a taller, upright marginal plant such as sedge, rush, cattail even iris. I use it in container water containers to add a pop of color at the base of a marginal plant. I like the top of

the growing pot to be at water level or just above. It is a tidy plant seldom getting leggy. If it does, pinch back to encourage branching. From one four-inch grower's pot of *Houttuynia*, I usually divide into two maybe three plants. It only takes a small piece to grow a new plant.



Houttuynia cordata 'Chamaeleon' planted with an upright marginal plant in a container water garden. Its early summer flower.

The species, *Houttuynia cordata*, is native to Southeast Asia where it is eaten as a leafy green in some countries and used in traditional medicine. The leaf is said to have a 'fishy' taste, hence the common names fish mint and fish leaf. It was named for 18th century Naturalist Martinus Houttuyn.