

Trillium ovatum

Common Name: Trillium, Wake Robin

Another of the early spring blooms on Moscow Mountain and in surrounding foothill areas is the Trillium. This member of the lily family is generally found in April and May in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and neighboring states. Often only the single stalks bearing three large sessile leaves are seen, but when the mature bulb is doing well then there is a single large white flower as well with three petals and three sepals. This is the most common of the trilliums in the Northwest. It grows best in moist woods often under conifers. In some places only a few plants stand, but it is not unusual to see a colony of these beautiful plants. The plant forms a seed pod shaped like a "Hershey's Kiss". When the seeds are ripe, the pod splits and disperses the seeds which may be carried further by ants.



Variations: Sometimes the flower will seem quite pink or even purple, however this is most often due to the flower aging. A rare double could be seen.

Use in the landscape: Although the bulb could be dug and transplanted into a partially shaded flower bed this is not recommended. If the plant stem were to break during transplanting, it would rob the bulb of its bloom for the current year and of the potential bloom for the next. Trilliums grow easily from seed which is available from select sources. Some have propagated trilliums from offsets formed when the rhizome is wounded. I found no references to successful tissue culture. When propagating from seed, separate the seed from the pulp in the pod. Do not let the seeds dry out. They should be planted in an acid, peaty mixture. The first stage of germination a small stem appears, then after a dormancy period the seedling continues to grow. The problem with propagating from seed is that the seed may take one to three years to germinate, then several years to form leaves so the flower may take 6 years or more from the time the seed is planted. A winter dormancy period of about 3 months must be part of the formula whether one plants in the ground or in pots. Trilliums like moisture in the spring but drier conditions in the summer. The rhizome will settle deeper with each year as it ages.

Edibility: The leaves have been used as salad and as cooked greens.

Pests: Deer often will eat the flower and stem thus robbing the rhizome of food which would be developed by the blooming plant. Mice also will eat the rhizomes. In areas where slugs are common, trilliums are often the favorite food. People who pick the flowers however must be ranked high among the pests.

Trillium petiolatum (the round-leaved trillium) has three large round leaves on a stalk and grows quite lush and will form multiple stalks in a flower bed with the right conditions as well. The maroon flower is quite unusual, but it hides under the leaves so adds little to entice the native plant gardener.

Native Plants should not be dug from the wild. Please purchase from reputable dealers.

For more information do a Google search on *trillium ovatum* or *petiolatum*. Or see Arthur R. Kruckeberg, [Gardening with Native Plants of the Pacific Northwest](#)