

TRILLIUM – A NATIVE WILDFLOWER

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While strolling through our woods in April and May, trillium is one of the earliest flowers to be seen. This graceful plant of the forest floor has many common names, such as “birthroot” and “wake-robin,” denoting its position as a harbinger of spring. Trillium is easily recognized by its perfect symmetry: three leaf-like bracts, three sepals, and three petals, and thus has another common name, the “trinity flower.”

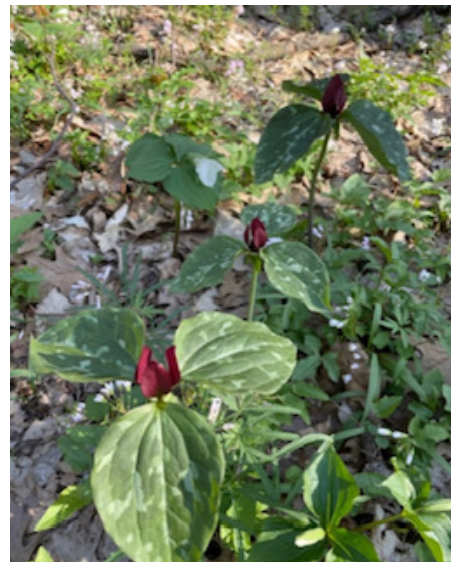
Over fifty species of trillium have been identified in North America. Seven of these find a home in Indiana. The snow trillium (*T. nivale*) is one of the first to emerge (as early as March 11) and is very hardy as it frequently gets covered with snow. Though not found in the Beverly Shores area, it is known in Northeast Illinois and in several counties a little to the south of us.

Prairie trillium (*T. recurvatum*) starts blooming in early April. It can grow 12 to 18 inches, has mottled leaves, and a maroon bloom. While common in Indiana, it is much rarer in Michigan and the Chicago area. Populations are protected in Michigan, including one in Warren Woods State Park. The prairie trillium is frequently found in Beverly Shores along with the great white trillium (*T. grandiflorum*). The great white trillium blooms in mid-April to late May; its flowers start out white and fade to pink with age.

Trillium grows from a rhizome, its flowers are insect-pollinated, and it produces a capsule-like berry by mid-summer. Disturbing the leaves of a trillium, or picking the flower, is injurious to the plant, even if the rhizome is not touched. And in protected areas where a species is considered threatened or endangered, it is illegal to pick them.

Trillium occupies the same ecological niche as garlic mustard. Unfortunately, the white-tailed deer avoid garlic mustard, they love trillium. While Beverly Shores was once carpeted in spring by trillium flowers, heavy deer browsing has made these lovely plants a rarity and has opened the way for replacement by garlic mustard and other invasive species.

Trillium can be added to one’s wildflower landscape or garden. Great white trillium prefers fertile, well-drained soil and grows best in areas with morning sun and afternoon shade. Prairie trillium has a wider tolerance of garden conditions and spreads readily. Trillium can be purchased, but it is imperative that it be obtained legally through a nursery, and not taken from the woods.



Please visit our website at www.bsrg.org/resource-library for further information on native plants.
