

## Painted Trillium (*Trillium undulatum*)

### Identification:

Like all the trilliums, painted Trillium is arranged on the basis of 3. Three oval leaves arranged in a whorl sit atop a 8-20 inch stem. Rising above the leaves, sitting on a pedicle is a beautiful three-petaled white blossom. Each petal is “painted” with red near its base. This splash of color radiates out for a stunning effect. The petal edges are somewhat wavy and the tips turned back when in full bloom. Three sepals, which protected the blossom when in bud, are seen below the blossom alternating between the petals. Six stamens emerge from around the three styles in the very center. Everything except the stem adheres to the rule of threes.

After pollination, usually by August, a red berry can be seen where the flower blossom was.



### Natural History:



The common and Generic name, Trillium, comes from the Latin word, “Tres” which means “Three”. Most everything about this plant is in threes. Even the ovary is six lobed with three styles.

Each plant arises from a rhizome, or underground stem. Native Americans used this stem medicinally as an eye medicine and to ease the pain of childbirth.

One Native American superstition claimed a Trillium root, served by a young woman to a man would make him fall in love with her. The story goes like this: There was a young girl who desired the handsome young son of the chief. She boiled the root and put it in some food and went to serve the meal to her intended. On the way, she tripped and the root fell into the bowl of an old decrepit man, who

fell in love with her instead. Don't make this same mistake.

**Trillium seed is designed for ant dispersal. When the seeds are mature, and the fruit has opened up and dropped them on the ground, the sticky seeds just wait to be found. Each seed has a substance on it that ants are attracted to. Once found, an ant will drag this “elaiosome” with its attached seed back to its nest, where it will be eaten. The seed is just a by-product, so it gets discarded in the waste heap, where it will eventually germinate.**

**From seed to blossom, a trillium takes a minimum – a minimum- of 6 years. In the first year of life, the seed merely puts out a root. It is not even visible above ground. The following year, if all is well, it will send up a small leaf. The third through fourth or fifth year or longer, a single leaf will**

**appear, providing sustenance to the growing rhizome below. Finally, the plant will produce the characteristic three leaves, which it may repeat for two to three more years. Finally, a blossom will be produced once it has achieved maturity. Once a trillium is established, it is very long-lived, as long as the rhizome is undisturbed.**



### **Significance:**

**Many trillium species seem to be a favorite browse for deer. In places where deer populations are high, trillium populations suffer. Many states forbid the picking or transplanting of trillium in order to protect wild populations.**