

TRILLIUMS

Question: My next door neighbor has lots of Trilliums growing in their woods. How can I get them started on my property?

Answer: Trilliums are some of the most attractive spring wildflowers in Alabama. They are easily recognized by a whorl of three leaves at the top of an otherwise naked stalk, from which arises the single stalked or stalkless often very showy flower. The petals range in color from white to pink, purplish, yellow, or maroon. The fruit is a many-seeded berry likewise divided into three's. They are beautiful right now here at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens in the Alabama Woodlands garden.

In general trilliums prefer rich, moist, humus-filled soil and the shade of mixed deciduous and evergreen woods. The natural reproduction of trilliums does not seem to be especially prolific therefore it is important that we practice conservation with these beautiful flowers. Under proper conditions they are easily grown and long-lived perennials. A good, rich woods soil, reasonable amount of moisture, and good shade are essential.

If you are in close proximity and don't have the same plants as your neighbor there could be an environmental reason you don't see them in your yard. Ask yourself some basic questions about possible differences between your property and your neighbors. Do you have the same type shade? Is the soil significantly different? Did your neighbor plant them or did they grow naturally?

If you want to try and get them started in your woods they can be propagated from seed or vegetatively. Trilliums take quite a while to flower from seed but it is possible to collect the seed in late June or early July. They can be planted directly in humus rich soil but some species require two years to germinate. They can also be propagated vegetatively by rhizome cuttings or rhizome division. Division may be the easiest method. According to Jan Midgely in her handbook, Native Plant Propagation, "division is successful when the plant is dormant either in fall or late winter before the new growth emerges." She recommends that you "break or cut segments of rhizome from the mother plant. Each segment should have a growing point and feeder roots. If done when active growth is beginning in the spring, no fungicide is needed (to prevent rot)."

In transplanting trilliums, cover the tuber-like rhizome with at least two inches of soil. Space plants about ten inches apart and be sure to water them in dry weather. Trilliums thrive in well drained soil with lots of organic matter, and where the pH is neutral or slightly acid.

Since you can't pick trillium without picking the leaves, don't pick the flowers at all! Those leaves provide the food for next year's flower.

For more information on propagation of Trilliums and other Alabama wildflowers I would highly recommend Jan Midgely's handbook called, Native Plant Propagation. It is

available directly from Jan and she can be contacted at jwildflwr@aol.com . For general growing information and to see some great photos visit, www.auburn.edu/~deancar/ or visit www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/A/ANR-0623/ for a good introduction to Alabama wildflower growing.

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