

*Trillium erectum*

[Synonyms : *Trillium atropurpureum*, *Trillium erectum* var. *album*, *Trillium erectum* var. *atropurpureum*, *Trillium erectum* var. *flavum*, *Trillium flavum*, *Trillium foetidum*, *Trillium obovatum*, *Trillium rhomboideum* var. *atropurpureum*]

**BETHROOT** is a perennial. Native to eastern North America it has small, rich deep red to pink (occasionally golden yellow, green, or white) flower.

It is also known as American shamrock, Bathflower, Bathwort, Bath root, Benjamin, Bett root, Birth root, Bloody nose, Brown Beth, Bumble-bee root, Carrion flower, Coughroot, Daffydowndilly, Death root, Dishcloth, Dog flower, Ground lily, Herb Paris, Herb true-love, Ill-scented trillium, Ill-scented wake-robin, Indian balm, Indian shamrock, Jew's-harp plant, Lamb's quarters, Lamb's succory, Milk ipecac, Mountain lettuce, Nodding wakerobin, Nosebleed, One-berry, Orange blossom, Paris, Pariswort, Purple trillium, *Purpurtreblad* (Swedish), Rattlesnake root, Red benjamin, Red death, Red trillium, Red wake robin, Rule-of-three, Shamrock, Snakebite, Squaw flower, Squawroot, Stinking Benjamin, Stinking dishcloth, Three-leaved nightshade, Trillium, True love, Wake robin, Wet-dog trillium, Wild peony, Wild piny, and Wood lily; and in flower language it is said to be a symbol of sympathy.

The flower's unpleasant smell attracts pollinating carrion flies.

Warning – large amounts of roots and underground stems can be poisonous.

*Erectum* means 'upright or erect'.

Authorities believe that bethroot was introduced to western Europe in 1759.

When the reddish berry-fruit burst open the revealed seeds are harvested for their oil by ants.

Apparently authorities have recorded that they are prepared to carry seed more than 25 feet from the plant to their nest.

North American Indians (traditionally those living in the Appalachians) used the roots of this and other related species (especially the white flowering ones) in the treatment of a range of female ailments, and as an aphrodisiac. In addition Cherokee Indians turned to it as a treatment for asthma, coughs, cancer, bowel problems and skin disorders. The Iroquois applied it to sunburn, and the Abnaki tribe found it useful as a remedy for children's illnesses.

Herbalists who subscribed to the Doctrine of Signatures in vogue in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century used bethroot to treat gangrene because the obnoxious smell of the plant was reminiscent of that of the decaying flesh. Today the root is used in folk medicine only and can be considered a suitable remedy in the treatment of diarrhoea, dysentery, respiratory disorders, skin infections, ulcers, sores and wounds.