



plant focus: trilliums

Trillium grandiflorum
f. *roseum* originates in
Virginia, USA, and is
a much sought-after
variety for the garden.

AMERICAN BEAUTIES

In North America, carpets of trilliums are a common sight in spring - specialist growers **Hugh Nunn** and **Penny Dawson** of Twelve Nuns Nursery recommend some of their favourites ►

PHOTOGRAPHS CLIVE NICHOLS

plant focus: trilliums



LEFT *Trillium luteum* is one of the few yellow-flowered trilliums. Easy to grow, it can flower for up to eight weeks.

BELOW LEFT *Trillium grandiflorum* has stunning large white flowers. **BELOW**

RIGHT *Trillium flexipes* x. *sulcatum* is a hybrid of which there are many variations, including 'Harvington Dusky Pink'.

In the British Isles, we're used to seeing carpets of bluebells in woodland, but in the United States, the spring spectacular comes in the form of trilliums. They appear in dreamy drifts in shades of white, cream, yellow and maroon.

Also known as triplet lilies (so called, as the plant parts come in threes - three leaves on the stem and three petals on the flower), trilliums can be found growing in the wild in North America, from California to Washington State in the west and from Canada to Louisiana in the east. A few are found in China and Japan.

Like many plants of the forest floor, trilliums have to achieve a lot in a short space of time. Before the leaf canopy of the trees above is fully developed in May, the dormant plants must emerge, grow, flower and seed. They are able to do this thanks to the large food reserves stored in the rhizome the previous spring.

In the wild, the rhizomes are found just under the leaf litter surface, so they should not be planted too deeply. If you plant them a little too near to the surface, the roots attached to the rhizomes are able to contract or shorten, pulling the rhizome down to an optimal level. The reverse isn't true, however - a rhizome planted too deeply is unable to hoist itself higher.

Wild-dug imported rhizomes with dried up roots are mostly destined to fail - a rhizome without live roots will take two years to recover. This may explain why trilliums have a reputation for being tricky to grow. For the best results, it

Trilliums have a reputation for being tricky to grow. For the best results, buy established plants or freshly lifted rhizomes

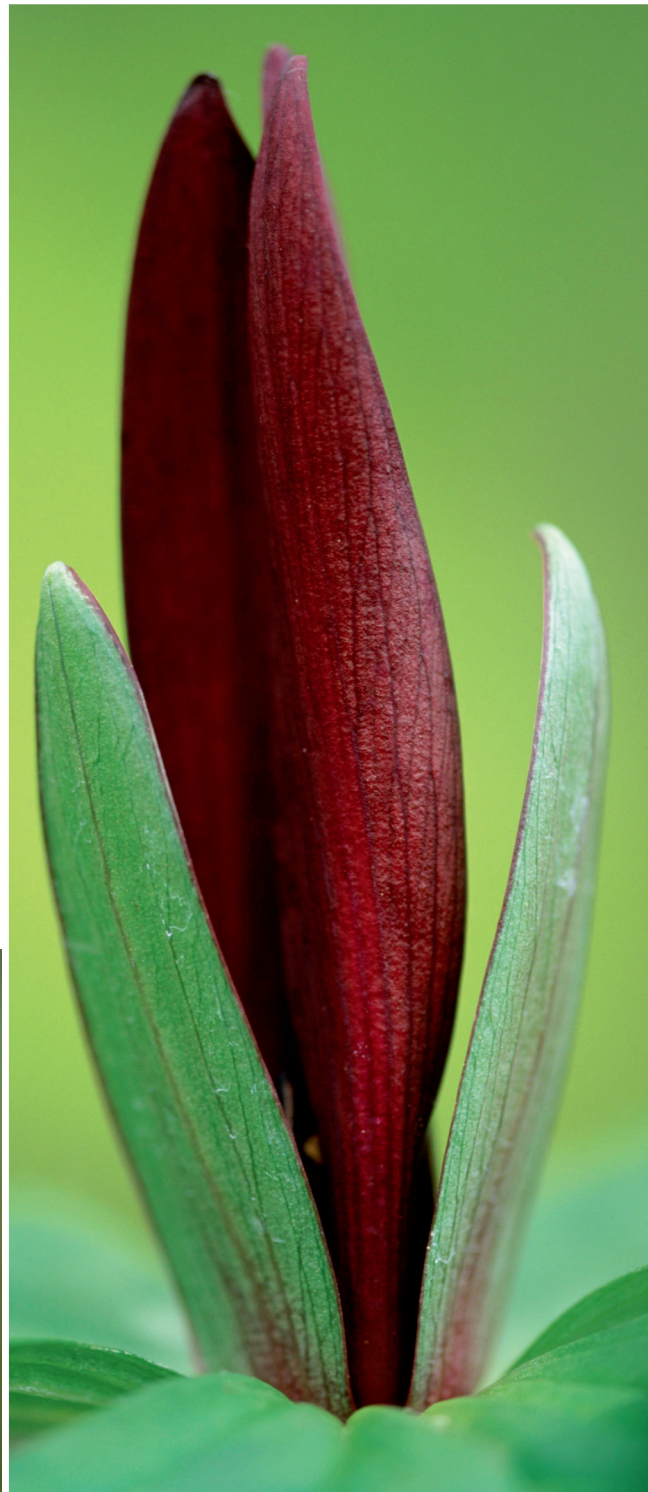


is best to buy sturdy established plants in pots, or freshly lifted rhizomes. Give them cool, light shade to replicate their natural woodland habitat - under deciduous trees and shrubs or on the shady side of a house is ideal. You will be surprised how quickly they can establish and flourish. Avoid hot, dry, sunny locations where the emerging leaves can desiccate.

There are around 40 species of trillium, of which some 10 to 15 are worth getting to know. One outstanding species is *T. grandiflorum*. It has glistening white trumpets, and occurs over a wide area of the eastern United States and northwards into Ontario, Canada. 'Wisconsin Strain' has broad white petals, while 'Flore Pleno' has white double flowers like a gardenia. There are also some pale and deep-pink treasures from Virginia, which are much sought after, including *T. grandiflorum* f. *roseum*. In the right conditions, *Trillium grandiflorum* varieties can spread and make beautiful clumps in the garden.

Trillium flexipes is much-loved type and easy to grow. In its natural habitat, it grows in ►

RIGHT *Trillium chloropetalum* has upright bold maroon flowers and mottled foliage. **BELOW** *Trillium sulcatum* has striking red flowers. **BOTTOM** *Trillium flexipes* is easy to grow as long as it is given plenty of organic matter.



TRILLIUM GROWING TIPS

- **Only plant strong living rhizomes from pots** or freshly lifted plants - avoid dried rhizomes that have been stored for many weeks.
- **Plant with plenty of garden compost** or leaf mould, and do not plant them more than 3-4cm deep.
- **Trilliums need light shade** from trees and shrubs or the side of the house.
- **Protect from slugs** when the new leaves are emerging in spring.
- **Trilliums like a good feed.** Plant with bonemeal in the planting hole and top dress with an organic mulch each year plus some fish, blood and bone feed.