



Trillium spp.

Names: Bethroot, Trillium, Birthroot, Wake Robin, Stinking Benjamin

Description: The showy three-petal blossoms of Trilliums are among the first to come up in spring, rising out of the middle of a single herbaceous stem and a whorl of three leaves 6 to 12 inches tall. The red trillium has a rotten meat smell, which attracts the flies that pollinate the plant. Most references to medicinal trilliums are *Trillium erectum* the red or purple trillium, but we have found that buyers also buy the white or pinkish *Trillium grandiflorum*, and older medical texts list other trilliums as having the same medicinal properties. Trilliums are sometimes found in large colonies. They are slow growing, and make take 4 to 7 years to flower. The fruit is a small berry.

Range and Habitat: Trilliums grow in rich, moist woods. They are concentrated in the Appalachian mountains, but are also found in the Northeast and Midwest.

Range for *Trillium erectum*



Range for *Trillium grandiflorum*



Uses: Bethroot has been known to regulate menstrual bleeding, alleviate the symptoms of menopause and facilitate childbirth. The name bethroot may have evolved from “birthroot.” Traditionally, Trillium has been used to treat a wider array of ailments, including skin diseases, ulcers, lung disease and digestive problems.

Average Price paid to harvesters in 2014: Wet: \$3.00 Dry: \$0.55

Trade in 2014: In 2014, around 12 percent of respondents reported purchasing bethroot. We are still working on our estimates for total output, but trillium made up less than 1 percent of total reported weight of all species we surveyed. Members of the American Herbal Products Association reported purchasing an average of about 1,300 pounds of bethroot annually between 2005 and 2010 (AHPA 2012).

Trade Distribution: The majority of trillium we recorded was bought in eastern Kentucky, but it was also purchased in east Tennessee, southwest Virginia, southern West Virginia, southern Ohio and western Pennsylvania.

Stewardship and cultivation: Many people harvest trilliums when they are in bloom and easy to find. However, like all roots, bethroot should be harvested after the seed has set. It can propagate by spreading, rhizome division or by seed, but seeds can be transported to other areas by gravity, wind or animals and start new patches, so it is recommended to not harvest bethroot until mid to late summer. The rhizomes and roots will continue to grow in weight and value, and the distinctive leaves are easy to spot until the plant dies back.

The market for bethroot is still relatively small but medicinal demand may grow, and there is a growing interest in growing these beautiful plants for nursery stock and the landscaping industry. Rhizome cuttings or seeds can be planted in cool, moist shady areas, and do best under hardwood canopies in well-drained, slightly acidic soils.

References:

American Herbal Products Association (AHPA). 2012. Tonnage survey results. Silver Spring, MD

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