

May Apple

Podophyllum peltatum

Look for May Apple in the wetlands and the wooded area behind the houses on Buckingham.

American Mandrake, or May Apple, is a unique woodland plant in that it has only 2 leaves and 1 flower. It grows to about 18 inches high; and the stem separates into two large, dark green, leaves looking almost like umbrellas to protect the large white flower that grows right in-between the leaves. May Apple flowers turn into crab apple size lemon-shaped berry. The common name refers to the April-May blooming of its apple-blossom-like flower.



May Apple spreads by underground rhizomes, forming dense mats in damp, rich, open woods. Although the leaves, roots, and seeds are poisonous if ingested in large quantities, the dark brown roots may be gathered after the foliage dies back and dried for later use as a medicinal herb. Native Americans are said to have used the roots as a cathartic. May Apple, is currently being tested as a possible treatment for cancer as it contains podophyllin, which interferes with cell division and can thus prevent the growth of cells.



The fully ripe, golden-yellow fruits can be eaten raw, cooked or made into jams, jellies, marmalades, and pies. It is very aromatic, and has a sweet peculiar but agreeable flavor. May Apple seeds and rind, however, are not edible as they are said to be poisonous.

May Apple was once called the witches umbrella and thought to be employed by them as a poison! The English version of this plant, called Manroot (mandrake), is believed to be alive; and its screams when it's pulled from the ground would render a man permanently insane.

May Apple blooms April through May.