

Trilliums Need a Place to Stand and a Place to Grow

In a landscape where urban development comes at the expense of natural spaces, more Ontarians probably recognize the trillium flower as the logo on our Ontario driver's license than as an iconic Ontario wildflower.

Ontario is home to five species of trillium and all are found growing in deciduous and mixed forests. Trilliums are known as spring ephemerals – plants that emerge quickly in the spring, flower for a few weeks, and then die back until next spring. The common white trillium (*Trillium grandiflorum*) typically blooms in late April and May. After three weeks, the white flower turns pale pink.

In a British botanical work published in 1760, trilliums were referred to as “the herb true love of Canada.” After the First World War, there was the desire to have a national flower to plant on the graves of Canadian servicemen buried overseas. While Canada never acquired a national flower, the white trillium was officially adopted as Ontario's floral emblem in 1937.

Visiting a local forest and picking a patriotic bouquet of trilliums might seem like a noble way to celebrate your appreciation of Ontario and its biodiversity, but please don't. Trilliums are slow growing – taking between seven and eleven years before they produce their first flower! Picking a trillium can seriously damage the plant and it can take years for the plant to recover. Since the plant spends only a few short weeks above ground, if the flower and its three leaves are picked, there is not enough plant left to resupply its underground stem with the nutrients needed to survive until next year's emergence. It is actually illegal to pick trilliums in British Columbia, Michigan and New York state, but it is not illegal in Ontario (but is highly discouraged)!

Now you Try:

Ontario's provincial flower is 1) distinctive, 2) beautiful, and 3) fragile. Do you think that this is the best choice for a logo? If you were put in charge of designing a new floral logo for Ontario, what plant would you pick? One that is common? Tough? Beautiful? Rare? Flex your artistic muscles and design a new logo for the province. What does your floral emblem say about Ontario?

References:

- <https://www.orangeville.com/news-story/8625679-ontario-blooms-it-s-not-illegal-to-pick-a-trillium-but-here-s-why-you-shouldn-t/>
- <https://www.ontarioparks.com/parksblog/trilliums/>
- photo from Wikipedia