



Klamath Network Featured Creature

November, 2011

Pacific Trillium, Western Wake Robin (*Trillium ovatum*)

General Description: This perennial species grows as an herb ranging 20-45 cm in height. When fully developed, the plant lacks basal leaves and has 3 stem leaves in a single whorl. The leaves are ovate to round and 5-18 cm long. Trillium flowers are erect to nodding, and have 3 white petals; however the petals transform to pale pink as they age.

The flowers bloom between March and June. The common name Wake Robin came about because the flowers appear early in the spring, around the time the of Robin's arrival. Early in the season, trilliums may be seen before their leaves have completely unfurled. As the flowers begin to open, the three leaves are still wrapped around the petals like a protective hood. *Trillium ovatum* is distinguished from other species of *Trillium* by its stalked flowers and sessile leaves.



Image from CurbstoneValley.com

Ethnobotany: Native American peoples are known to have used *Trillium ovatum* as a medicinal herb. The Karok and Quileute used the juice of scraped rhizomes as a dermatologic aid, applying the residues to boils. In addition, the Paiute, Lummi and Skagit used an infusion of the trillium roots as an eye medicine.



Image from <http://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers>

Distribution: Native to the west coast of North America, ranging from British Columbia to California, and east to Idaho, Montana, Wyoming and Colorado. A similar species, *Trillium grandiflorum*, is more common on the east coast of North America, and is similar in appearance. *Trillium ovatum* is present at 4 of the 6 Klamath Network units: Redwood National Park, Whiskeytown Recreation Area, Crater Lake National Park, and Oregon Caves National Monument.



Map from Flora of North America

Habitat: Grows in mixed-evergreen forests on heavily wooded slopes. It occurs in maritime to sub maritime, cool mesothermal climates, and often in nitrogen-rich soils. It inhabits low to mid-elevations (10-2,000 meter range). *Trillium ovatum* commonly grows in open areas under the shade of large trees like Douglas fir. It is associated with understory plants, including ferns, vanilla leaf, violets, redwood sorrel and salal.



Image from USDA Plant Database

Reproduction: Trilliums grow from an underground rhizome. Each year after the flowers and leaves senesce, the plant becomes dormant, but will re-emerge from the same rhizome the following spring. Trilliums may also reproduce from seed; however it takes approximately two to three years for the seed to germinate. When started from seeds it takes at least six to seven years for a plant to bloom.

More Information:

Pojar, J. & A. MacKinnon. 1994. Plants of the Pacific Northwest Coast: Washington, Oregon British Columbia, Alaska. Vancouver B.C., Lone Pine Publishing.