

# Non-Timber Forest Product (NTFP) Highlight: Mayapple



Wild mayapples – (photo credit: adobe)

Other common names: American mandrake, wild mandrake, and ground lemon — Latin Name: *Podophyllum peltatum*

Family: Berberidaceae (barberry family)



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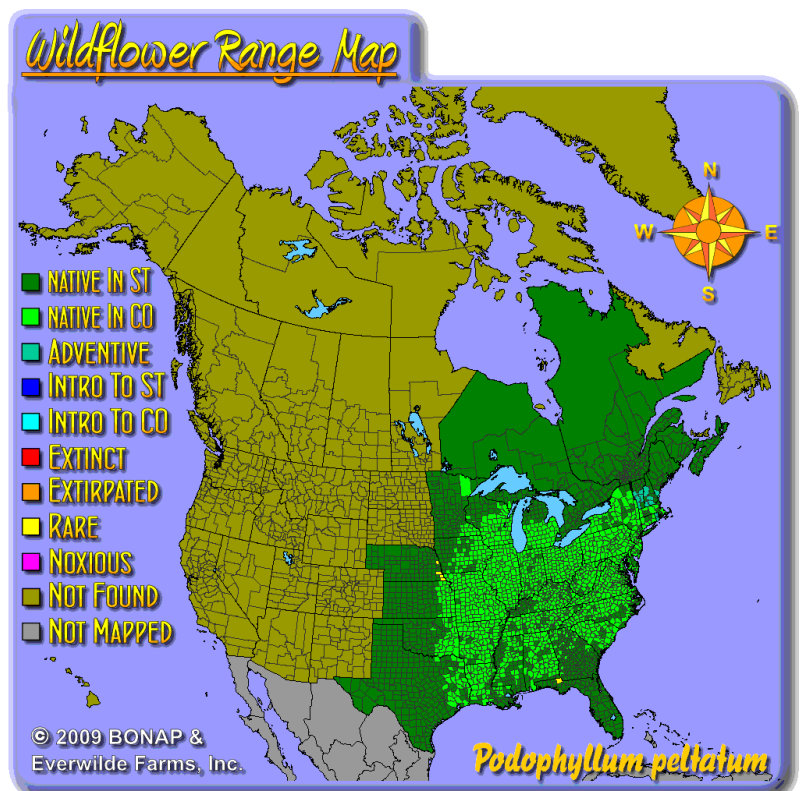
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## Range:

Mayapple can be found throughout the eastern half of the United States.



## Description:

Mayapples have distinctive pairs of large umbrella-like leaves that rise from a one to two-foot single stalk. They produce a single creamy white flower that dangles below the leaves. Mayapple produces a small fruit during the summer, that while poisonous when green, is edible in small quantities once it has ripened and turned yellow. All other parts of the plant are considered toxic.

## Propagation:

Mayapple can both spread through root division and seed. It is easy to propagate by dividing the rhizomes into two-to-three-inch pieces containing a node. Reproduction by seed is more difficult. Planting seeds immediately after harvest results in the greatest germination success.

## Pests:

Mayapple has no serious insect or disease problems. There have been reports of the plant being infected with rust, but it was not deadly.

## Harvest:

To harvest mayapple for use as a cut flower or for the leaves, snip the plant off at the stem. Destructive harvests of roots can be dug similarly to goldenseal once the leaves die back in the fall.

## Conservation status:

Not threatened.

## Market potential:

The market for mayapple root is small, with root buyers paying \$2-\$5 per dried pound in 2014 (Davis and Persons, 2014). When creatively sold directly to herbalists and small local markets, growers can receive up to \$10.50 per dried pound. While the prices for mayapple remain low, there is growing interest in the plant among researchers. Mayapple contains a compound called podophyllotoxin that is used for making cancer-fighting chemicals. Previously, the major source for this compound was the Asian mayapple (*Podophyllum emodi*), which has been severely over-harvested in the wild. With the declining availability of Asian mayapple, there is great potential to turn forest cultivation of the American mayapple to supply this antitumor compound (Davis and Persons, 2014).



*Image of mayapple in flower*

## References:

Davis, J., & Persons S. W. (2014). Growing and marketing ginseng, goldenseal, and other woodland medicinals. (3rd ed.) New Society Publishers.