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ERYTHRONIUMS OF WESTERN NORTH AMERICA PART 2



Erythronium montanum flowers

Erythronium montanum is one of the real gems and often described as being impossible to flower in cultivation. It has plain shiny green leaves and large white flowers whose petals twist away towards the ends.



Erythronium montanum

It is perfectly happy growing in both pots and beds in our cool northern garden and we regularly get good quantities of seeds set. In the wild it can be found growing from Oregon up to Vancouver Island.



Erythronium elegans

Erythronium elegans, hails from Oregon and is very similar to montanum; it has white flowers which turn pink as they age. I know it is more widely grown than montanum so perhaps it is more amenable to general cultivation.

It is said that it can have patterned leaves but all the plants we have raised from both introduced and home produced seed have plain or almost plain green leaves. A few have the slightest hint of a silver pattern on when they first emerge but this soon fades. *E. elegans* slowly forms clumps by offsets.



Erythronium elegans flower

It is possible that it has evolved from an ancient hybrid between *montanum* and *revolutum* which would account for the pink tinge that appears in some flowers as they fade.



Erythronium klamathense

One of the smallest in stature of the western species found in California and Oregon at under 10cms, is **Erythronium klamathense**. Each stem can have five small white flowers, with a yellow centre, over shiny plain green leaves.



Erythronium idahoense

Erythronium idahoense is rare in cultivation but is occasionally offered as seed on specialist seed lists, it also has plain green leaves and white flowers. Its distribution is restricted to parts of Eastern Washington and western Idaho.



Erythronium grandiflorum

Erythronium grandiflorum is the best of the western yellows for the rock garden; it has good sized bright yellow flowers over shiny plain green leaves. It has a wide distribution and can be found from Vancouver Island in Canada down through most of the western states to California.



Erythronium grandiflorum varieties

Three varieties are named depending on the colour of the anthers; var grandiflorum has brown pollen, var chrysandrum, yellow and var pallidum, cream.



Erythronium grandiflorum red edge

We grow a good form of var pallidum that has a nice purple red line around the leaf edges which is passed onto all the seedlings that we have raised from it.



Erythronium tuolumnense

Erythronium tuolumnense, from Tuolumne County, California, is the largest growing of all and some forms can get up to 50cms tall with wide pale green leaves and flower stems with several good yellow flowers. It has had an undeserved reputation of being shy flowering but it flowers every year in our garden where we grow it both in full sun and full shade.



Erythronium tuolumnense forms

As with all the erythroniums I have been raising many forms of this plant from seed as well as getting bulbs from various sources and while they are all basically similar they do vary in the shade of yellow of the flowers, the number of flowers to a stem, how the flowers are held on the stem, (some look outwards, some look downwards,), the height of the stem and the size of the leaves. The form that is mass produced for the trade tends to be a large leaved form which, while nice, is not the best for the rock garden.

Tuolumnense has given rise to many of the commonly seen larger hybrids that are offered in garden centres such as 'Kondo' and 'Pagoda'. I will look at the hybrids in a future article.

Erythronium taylorii

Erythronium taylori is another recently described species from the central Sierra Nevada that is related to *tuolumnense*. It has plain shiny green leaves and a yellow flower with a white centre.



Erythronium taylori flower

Our plant has flowered for three years now and we have had up to three flowers per stem but I suspect that it will do better than that when it is released into the garden.



Erythronium hendersonii

Found in southern Oregon and northern California, **Erythronium hendersonii** has that combination of pale pink to white petals with a blackcurrant coloured throat that no matter what plant it appears in, such as hepatica, nomocharis, peony, etc. is always universally irresistible. Again I have seen a lot of misnamed plants offered as hendersonii.



Erythronium hendersonii flower

It is easily identified as no other N. American erythronium I have seen has this combination of colours with the ovary, style and throat all a deep blackcurrant colour.

These are the species that we regularly flower and collect seed from in our garden. Most of them we have raised from seed so we see a wide variation in size, shape and colour. We also have an increasing number of hybrids both old and new, some of which show promise of being good garden plants. I will look at these and our cultivation methods in a future article.