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TRILLIUM AND OTHER TRILLIACEAE

There is an increasing interest in the genus *Trillium* and its allies in Trilliaceae, such as *Trillidium*, *Paris* and *Scoliopus*. Many are already quite fashionable with gardeners both in North America and in Europe. The 30 or species of the North American Trilliums are concentrated in two groups, one in the East and the other in the West but both have a North to South distribution. Sadly most plants sold commercially are still collected from wild colonies. While this may or may not be detrimental to the status of the species concerned in the wild, it is certainly detrimental to their reputation in cultivation. These wild-collected plants re-establish slowly and with difficulty. Losses are almost always considerable. Well grown cultivated plants whether originating from seed or from vegetative propagation will always make faster and better progress. We are concerned with collecting and distributing seed of unusual species and trying to establish them widely in cultivation. *Trillium* is a genus deserving of our attention but we until recently we avoided becoming greatly involved with it because of reputed difficulties in handling and despatching the seed as well as the difficulties likely to be experienced by growers in germinating it.

There are many unanswered questions regarding seed-germination and not a few myths, based on hearsay rather than facts. As the Cases state in their monograph, "published experimental documentation of the germination phenomena is surprisingly skimpy." Regarding the so-called "double dormancy", we can tell you from personal experience that washed, damp-stored seeds of *T. ovatum*, *Trillidium govanianum* and *Paris polyphylla* have all germinated in our office after about 9 months at a more or less constant 20 C (70 F) without any cold period. We had hoped to inhibit germination by keeping it at an even temperature. We can also tell you that *T. rivale* germination is not affected by several months of dry storage at a similar temperature. It was our dried seed of this which the Cases state "germinated profusely" when about 18 months old. Our object is to distribute viable seed to you, in the most convenient manner, at an appropriate time for sowing but after some experimentation, we have decided that to store and despatch *Trillium* seed moist is just not workable for us.

Apart from occasionally being able to offer some species from wild-collections, at present most of the *Trillium* seed we have available each year comes from the German enthusiast Hermann Fuchs, who has long experience of this genus both in the wild and in cultivation. Hermann dries the seeds before despatch to us and we usually have fresh but dried seed available from him in October each year. What he can send us is dependent on the spring weather at the time of flowering. Seed does not mature with him until later than that grown in the UK, where spring comes earlier. This seed should be sown as soon as possible after receipt. With conventional methods, you are unlikely to have any germination before the second spring after

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sowing. We are increasingly inclined to subscribe to the counsel of (the late) Kath Dryden, one of the most experienced English growers of this genus. Kath told us to “sow it, put it outside and wait.” Our friends Bob and Rannveig Wallis tell us they have also usually been successful with dried seeds using a similar simple method. Feed-back from those who have used various refrigeration and warming techniques has been mixed. Melvyn Jope on the other hand tells us he has never failed to germinate any Trillium seed he has had from us, dried or otherwise, by sowing on to composted bark (easily obtained in the UK at any rate) and placing the pots outside. The consensus is that fresh, dried seed offers no problems. Germination may take time but such a simple and trouble-free technique has proved a reliable method for many patient growers.

Nomenclature and Further information: Two monographs on this genus were published in 1997: “Trilliums” by Frederick W. Case and Roberta B. Case and “American Treasures: Trilliums in Woodland and Garden” by Don L. Jacobs and Rob L. Jacobs. There is also a more recent less significant publication. If you wish to refer to only one book, choose the one by the Cases. This is certainly not to say the book by the Jacobs can be disregarded. It is highly thought of by several growers who know far more about Trillium than us. There is an excellent review of Trillium taxonomy by the Cases on pages 67 to 72 of their book. We use the nomenclature used by the Cases, which is based on the work of J.D. Freeman, L. Barksdale, T.S. Patrick and V. Soukup. These names are not always adopted by regional floras, even modern ones like “Jepson”, in the case of the Californian taxa.