

# School-to-Nature



## May Apple- Plant, Flower, Fruit

Mayapple plants grow in colonies in many Conservancy woodlands, in shady areas where there is good leaf mulch and soil moisture. The tall, umbrella-looking plants actually have only TWO leaves that have many lobes; and each Mayapple plant will have only ONE flower each season. Plants may reach 12-18 inches tall, and each leaf may spread 10-12 inches wide. Plants growing in a colony are all growing from the same rhizomes, underground roots that form new sprouts.

As the name suggests, Mayapple blooms in May, with a white or pinkish flower that has 6-9 petals. It is typically pollinated by bumblebees. A cherry-like tangy fruit forms later in summer (called the "apple"). It is edible in small quantities as long as the fruit is very yellow or reddish-yellow, soft and ripe; this fruit is toxic while it is hard and green.



The leaves, stems, roots, and rhizomes of the plant can be handled but no part of it should be eaten, as plant juices are highly toxic. Mayapple contains a chemical called podophyllotoxin, which has been used to treat some cancers. It also contains salicylic acid, which was used by Native Americans and early settlers as a topical (skin only) medicine to treat plantar warts.



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