Podophyllum
peltatum
North American Native

Podophyllum (pod-o-fil-lum)
From the Greek
anapodophyllum, , a duck,
podos, a foot and phyllon, a
leaf, referring to the leaves of
P. peltatum, with the stalk
attached away from the margin
of the leaf blade and often in
the center of it.

peltatum (pel-tah-tum) peltate,
the leaves, shield-shaped.

Zones: 3 – 8  Flower Color: White  Height: 8 – 20”  Spacing: 6”

About the Species:

Common Name: May Apple     Family: Berberidaceae
Large, rounded, umbrella-like leaves on 8-20” stalks shelter the
2” wide nodding white flower in April and May. Short-lived
flowers produce an egg- shaped whitish berry that turns yellow
when ripe. Flowers can be best seen when the plants are
installed on slopes above a walk or path. It forms colonies from
the creeping rhizomes and may advance up to 12” per year.
May apple is drought tolerant but will go summer dormant
unless it receives plenty of moisture.

Habitat: Podophyllum peltatum grows in low, moist or dry,
open woods, and thickets.

In the Garden: Use for naturalizing in woodland settings, as a deciduous ground
cover for large areas and tough locations, or in wild or native plant gardens. Plant
in part shade to full shade in average, medium moisture, well-drained soil.

Umbrellas in the woods.

Podophyllum peltatum grow in large drifts in my woodland. A few are close to the brick wall of
my house where I keep them thinned out. They have rhizomes that are easy to dig out except
where they are entangled with the Christmas Fern roots. In the woods, they are easy to see before
the trees leaf out. It’s interesting that after the flowers emerge, the deer will eat the flowers in
some sections then come back and eat the leaf, leaving the stems that look like a bunch of Y’s.
Strictly wild, this area has Aster divaricatus, Asarum, several kinds of ferns, Aquilegia, Galium,
Cimicifuga, Mertensia, Smilicina, and other wildflowers like Dutchman’s Breeches, Showy
Orchid, Trout Lilies, and Spring Beauties. Some were there when we built our house and left the
dry shade area alone. Others were brought in and allowed to go wild. This is no-man’s-land; no
additional watering and very little weeding. From the Blood Roots in the early spring to the
Asters in the fall, there is always something that Mother Nature has provided us to admire.

Other Uses: The rhizomes and leaves are poisonous and only the
ripe fruits are edible. The fruits have a lemon-like flavor and may
be eaten raw, cooked, dried, made into jelly, or the juice mixed with
lemonade and sugar as a drink. Native Americans used the
rhizomes as a purgative and the juice from the rhizomes as an ear
drop to treat deafness. They
would boil the plant and sprinkle
it on potato plants to kill potato
bugs. In my dry shade woodland,
the deer eat the leaf first, then the
flower, leaving a ‘y’ shaped stalk.