

Weird and Wonderful Podophyllums

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I have been fascinated by these unusual plants and found them quite easy to grow given the right conditions; they all flower in spring and produce ripe seed pods in late summer. Podophyllums are deciduous, rhizomatous clump forming woodland plants, also once known as *Dysosma*, and are members of the Barberry family of plants. There are about nine species, most are from Asia except one. The root and underground stem (rhizome) are used in medicine.

The following are the ones I have grown: - *Podophyllum peltatum* is North American, this one has a common name of 'May Apple' (which is a bit odd as it has nothing to do with apples and does not fruit in May), the white flowers are held horizontal on the stem beneath the leaves. *Podophyllum hexandrum*, a native of East Asia, Afghanistan and China, is the only *Podophyllum* that has the flowers above the foliage and facing upwards with fruit like large plums in late summer. It seeds readily in the near vicinity of the parent plant.



Podophyllum peltatum



Podophyllum hexandrum flower and fruit

P. delavayi is native to Asia, China and Japan and has the most incredible foliage which emerges in spring like small umbrellas, then opens into a divided star shape of multi-coloured patterns which can vary between plants; the flowers, as in most Asian species are held underneath the leaves hanging down, usually red. The plant has evolved with the flowers in this unusual position to enable them to be symbiotic with ground dwelling beetles to pollinate. The seed pods are apricot coloured.



P. delavayi leaf



P. delavayi flowers

Podophyllum deforme has very unusual angular leaves, which can be square or other shapes with angled corners, green or patterned.



P. deforme leaf

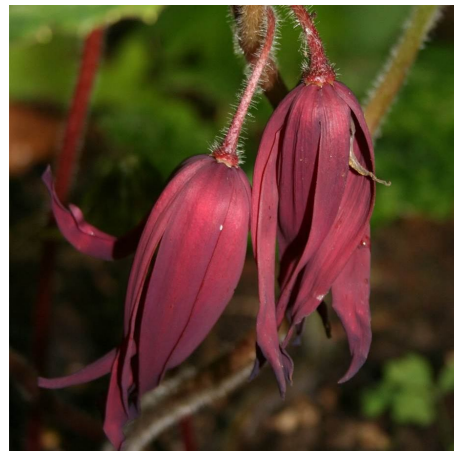


P. deforme flower

Podophyllum pleianthum has large dramatic glossy green leaves with the flowers on the stem beneath the leaves. *Podophyllum versipelle* is another Asian species with large deeply lobed glossy green leaves and has a variety called 'Spotty Dotty' with reddish brown patterned leaves which has recently become popular and is now available in many good nurseries and even some garden centres.



P. pleianthum flowers



P. versipelle flowers



There is one more *Podophyllum* that I have found well worth growing, it is a hybrid called 'Kaleidoscope' which aptly describes the pattern of the leaves.

Podophyllum 'Kaleidoscope' (hybrid)