



Common Name: DWARF TRILLIUM

Scientific Name: *Trillium pusillum* Michaux

Other Commonly Used Names: least trillium

Previously Used Scientific Names: none

Family: Trilliaceae (trillium) or Melanthiaceae (bunchflower)

Rarity Ranks: G3/S1

State Legal Status: Endangered

Federal Legal Status: none

Federal Wetland Status: FACW

Description: Perennial **herb** with erect stems $2\frac{3}{4}$ - 8 inches (7 - 20 cm) tall. **Leaves** 1 - 3 inches (2.5 - 8 cm) long and $\frac{3}{8}$ - $1\frac{1}{8}$ inches (1 - 3 cm) wide, dark green with 3 - 5 veins, in a whorl of 3 leaves at the top of the stem; leaf stalks absent or very short. **Flower** on a stalk up to $1\frac{1}{8}$ inches (3 cm) long, rising from the center of the whorl of leaves. **Sepals** 3, green, spreading or partially erect, with rounded tips and upturned edges, about as wide as the petals. **Petals** 3, delicate in

texture with wavy edges, ½ - 1⅛ inches (1.5 - 3 cm) long, spreading or with tips curved downwards, oval to lance-shaped, not overlapping at the base; white, turning pink with age. **Stamens** 6, erect, with yellow or purple pollen sacs (**anthers**) that open inward, and white or pale pink stalks (**filaments**). **Ovary** white, becoming a rounded, fleshy capsule.

Similar Species: Two other trilliums have white flowers that turn pink with age. Large-flowered trillium (*Trillium grandiflorum*) petals are 1½ - 3 inches (4 - 8 cm); the petals overlap at the base, forming a tube, then flare outward at the tips; leaves are very wide, up to 4¾ inches (12 cm) at midpoint. Catesby's trillium (*T. catesbaei*) flowers are held on a stalk that curves below broad leaves. Also compare with persistent trillium (*T. persistens*) in this guide.

Related Rare Species: There are at least 22 species of trillium in Georgia, nine of which are of Special Concern. Five of these are included on this website: Chattahoochee trillium (*Trillium decipiens*), pale yellow trillium (*T. discolor*), Edna's trillium (*T. persistens*), least trillium (*T. pusillum*), and relict trillium (*T. reliquum*).

Habitat: Seasonally wet swamps (calcareous flatwoods) with calcium-rich, clay soils and red maple, swamp black gum, Shumard oak, and willow oak.

Life History: Trilliums are perennial herbs that send up stems, leaves, and flowers in early spring, after temperatures have risen but before the forest canopy has leafed out. After flowering and fruiting, the aboveground plant disappears, persisting through the late summer, fall, and winter as an underground rhizome. Seeds shed in the summer germinate the following spring and, within a year or two, send up a single, spatula-shaped seed leaf (cotyledon) for one year's growing season. The next year, a true leaf is produced and, in subsequent years, three-leaved plants appear. After 5 - 7 years (possibly fewer in the Coastal Plain), the plant produces a flowering stalk. Trillium seeds have small, fat-rich appendages called elaiosomes that are appealing to ants, yellow jackets, and other wasps, which carry the seed back to their nests, inadvertently dispersing the trillium seeds. Seeds are dispersed longer distances when the fruits are eaten by other animals such as deer and woodchucks. Mature trillium plants are very long-lived, perhaps living hundreds of years, since the rhizome continues to lengthen and produce shoots on one end, while the other end decays.

Survey Recommendations: Surveys are best conducted during flowering (mid-March–April).

Range: Several varieties of this species, all rare, are known from Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Kentucky, Missouri, and Oklahoma. Georgia's plants may be a new variety, *georgianum*, found only in northwest Georgia.

Threats: Logging and clearing in floodplain forests. Ditching, draining, and filling in floodplains. Competition from exotic pest plants.

Georgia Conservation Status: Fewer than 300 plants occur in a single forest on private land in a rapidly developing industrial area.

Conservation and Management Recommendations: Protect floodplain forests from logging and clearing. Protect wetlands from ditching, draining, and development. Eradicate exotic pest plants.

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Author of Species Account: Linda G. Chafin

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