



Garden Tips

Growing Shamrocks

March 2011
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St. Patrick's Day will be coming soon and, along with green beer, there will be shamrock plants. While converting the pagans, St. Patrick used the three-leaf clover (*Trifolium repens*) to illustrate the Holy Trinity, and it has become the traditional symbol for Ireland, and for good luck. The word shamrock comes from the Celtic word for clover, "seamrog." Today, the plants we buy to celebrate St. Patrick's Day are actually another three-leaved plant called Oxalis. Oxalis and clover are often used interchangeably.

In Victorian times, the shamrock became the symbol for Irish rebellion and independence from England. If a soldier wore one on his uniform it was punishable by death.

The shamrock with tripartite leaves was also used in numerology, three being a sacred number. An upward direction of leaves was thought to predict bad weather. Actually, the leaves and flowers close up at night. Flower colors can be white, yellow and pink. Native to Mexico, Oxalis plants became very popular in Europe.

There are now numerous varieties to choose from, and they all make great houseplants. You must remember that the leaves will start to get yellow and die back when blooming is done, and then the plant will go dormant and rest. Just put it into low light, and cut back on watering until it produces new growth. Repotting once a year will give the plant a nutritional boost and give you a chance to check the rhizomes for dividing when ready. Although it's not hardy here, Oxalis can also be used in the garden as an annual.



Look for the original shamrock plant with white flowers, *Trifolium repens*, or some of these other choices: Oxalis Regnelli (top left), the "lucky plant" with pink flowers; a variegated cultivar "Irish Mist;" or a gorgeous deep-purple-leaved, pink-flowering gem called Oxalis triangularis.



One more to try might be Oxalis Deppei (bottom left), "the Iron Cross," which sports dark pink flowers and leaves with deep purple centers.

Some clovers grow up to 21 leaflets!!! Red clover may have anti-carcinogenic properties. Wood sorrel, Oxalis acetosella, and red clover, *Trifolium pratense*, are considered shamrocks.