

Mayflower

(from Bloom Institute of Holistic Living and Learning – on internet)



One of my hobbies is flower sniffing, and I must say, our beloved provincial flower rivals any exotic bloom when it comes to its scent. Time stands still when I have my nose buried in a bouquet of mayflowers.

It may not win the prize for showiest bloom, it is small, pale and unless you look for it, easy to miss. However, for me, part of its charm is the sweet subtlety of its appearance. Mayflower, also known as trailing arbutus, *Epigaea repens*, is native to Nova Scotia, usually found along the edge of forest trails or in exposed areas of woodlands. It trails or creeps along the ground, with dark green leathery leaves that remain on the plant year-round, the stem is hairy. The small white/pink blossoms form in small clusters, often hidden under the leaves. It is not to be found in meadows, nor in the garden; it requires a certain mushroom and soil pH to thrive, like most forest plants, thus it is difficult to cultivate. By taking care of its natural habitat, we can help to ensure that it continues to flourish.

Mayflower was designated as the provincial flower of Nova Scotia in 1901. It is fairly common here on the Eastern Shore where I live, and grew up. They were my obsession for the month of May; my house backed onto a forest, I was happily occupied with picking bouquets for my mother and school teachers.

We need not wait until May to find them; they can be found by mid-April in sunnier locations; which may be a result of a climate shift towards earlier spring warmth.

I haven't found many references for medicinal uses of mayflowers, other than for urinary ailments. Folkloric and Mi'kmaq references are readily available. According to the Mi'kmawey Debert Cultural Centre, mayflowers are wrapped in various traditions and stories; one being the spring activity of making beautiful birch bark cones lined with moss and mayflowers. You can find a story about this practice here: *Kiju – A story of netukulimk*, by Melody Martin-Googoo.

https://www.mikmaweydebert.ca/home/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Kiju_A-story-of-netukulimk_MTTK.pdf

In addition to enjoying the intoxication from their scent, I also like to pop a flower in my mouth and savour the flavour, it tastes as it smells, with a tannic finish on the tongue. Otherwise, I highly recommend simply admiring their beauty while on your spring walks in the woods.

