Of interest this week at Beal...

Prairie Trillium

*Trillium recurvatum*

Family: the Trillium family, Trilliaceae

Also called Bloody Noses, Bloody Butcher, Wake robin, Birthroot, Reflexed Trillium, Recurved Trillium

Prairie Trillium is certainly not limited to the prairie, as this native perennial is found in rich moist woodlands throughout the midwest including Michigan. The common names like Bloody Butcher, and Bloody Noses are making reference to the dark red color of the petals of the open flower. One occasionally sees “Red Trillium” as a common name for *T. recurvatum*, but Red Trillium is a legitimate common name for a different species, *Trillium erectum*. The W.J. Beal holdings of *Trillium recurvatum* are in the Endangered and Threatened Collection (bed number 91) and Economic Medicinal Plants III (bed number 88). It is also to be found on the habitat slopes facing the systematic collection and along the banks of the adjoining Red Cedar River.

The dark maroon or red color of the flower petals usually implies that flies, including the flies from the blowfly family, the Calliphoridae, could be involved in the pollination ecology of the Prairie Trillium. A study by Neil W. Sawyer at the University of Wisconsin Whitewater attempted to observe pollinators of *T. recurvatum* and the only species actually seen in many hours of watching 288 plants was a predator in the genus *Collops*, in the soft-winged beetle family, the Melyridae. Trillium fruits produce seeds that are equipped with a structure called an eliasome, that is an adaptation for feeding (recruiting) ants who then are active in the seed dispersal role.

The striking burgundy petals stand above the three sepals that are reflexed or recurved (hence the species epithet) below the plane of the petals and that serve to distinguish this species from most other *Trillium*. The three short-petioled leaves that top the 12” to 16” tall stems, are themselves ornamented with mottled patches of light and dark green shades that are by themselves an accent for gardeners to employ for visual interest even without the accompanying flowers. This contrasting mosaic appearance of the foliage fades after flowering.
In the Native American’s world it enjoyed widespread use as an aid to strengthening women’s menstrual cycles and as an aid to childbirth. *Trillium recurvatum* roots have been found to contain tannic acid which might explain why it has also found use, boiled in milk, as a treatment for diarrhea and dysentery.

Below: *In the Prairie Trillium*, *Trillium recurvatum*, the sepals hang, or are recurved, below the maroon red petals and are the source of the species name. The range of the Prairie Trillium greatly exceeds the geographic extent of the prairies.