

Wood-anemone and Rue-anemone

Family RANUNCULACEAE

Anemone quinquefolia and *Anemonella thalictroides*

Two Native New England Spring Ephemerals

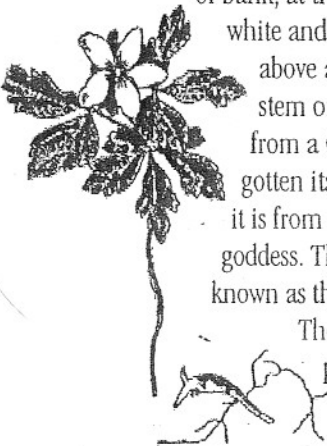
by Jean Healey

Rhode Island's early spring woodlands hold wild flower treasures, not the least of which are these two cousins in the Buttercup Family, the Wood-anemone and the Rue-anemone. Both are spring ephemerals that come up through the leaf litter with the spring rains, bloom in April and May before trees leaf out and shade them, then disappear below ground by late spring or summer, only to reappear the following spring. Both make exciting additions to a spring woodland wild flower garden. The dainty beauty of their flowers and foliage combined with their hardiness recommend them for use in the rich, organic soil of a deciduous woodland wild flower garden.

Wood-anemone; also Windflower; Mayflower *Anemone quinquefolia* L. var. *quinquefolia*

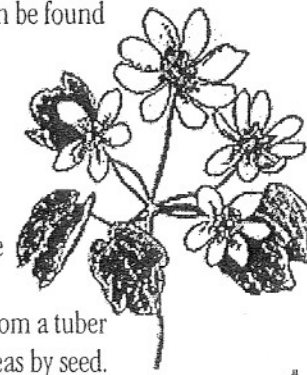
Treat yourself to an April or early May walk through one of Rhode Island's mixed deciduous woodlands, and there, on a moist hillside or bank, at the base of a bare-branched maple, a hickory, or perhaps a birch, you are likely to come upon a shining white and green carpet of petite Wood-anemones. Each white, cup-shaped flower is held aloft on a slender stem, just above a whorl of three divided leaflets. Large patches develop as the plant spreads by its underground creeping stem or rhizome. The dainty flowers tremble and dance in the breezes that sweep the forest floor. Anemone comes from a Greek word meaning "wind," but there are many different ideas about how the Windflower may have gotten its name. Perhaps it is from nature, because the flower was thought to grow where the wind blew. Or perhaps it is from a Greek myth in which the nymph Anemone was turned into a flower at the mercy of the wind by a jealous goddess. The Wood-anemone is so widespread and abundant in rich, moist woods early in May that it has also been known as the Mayflower. Should you pass its way on a cloudy day, however, you might miss its shining white flowers.

The flowers remain closed in low light, and have a strong daily rhythm. They open in the morning from a pinkish, slightly downturned bud into a glistening white, upturned cup as the sunlight reaches them. They close again at evening as the light fades.



Rue-anemone *Anemonella thalictroides* (L.) Spach

While the Wood-anemone is a common spring woodland sight, its relative the Rue-anemone can be found only in special places. Listed by the Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program as a rare plant, it requires a unique habitat—lime-rich woods such as those found in the towns of Lincoln and Cumberland in northern Rhode Island. The Rue-anemone is a small plant with eye-catching clusters of white or pinkish, upward-facing flowers held above delicately lobed foliage. Because the flowers are clustered and have more petals (actually petal-like sepals) than those of the Wood-anemone, the overall effect of a plant in bloom is much showier and fluffier. Its leaves are lobed like those of the Meadow Rue (*Thalictrum*), to which it is related, hence its common name and also its species name, *thalictroides*, meaning *Thalictrum*-like. Rue-anemone grows from a tuber that multiplies at its crown, so it will form small clusters over time. It can also spread to new areas by seed.



CULTIVATION NOTES

Anemone quinquefolia L. var. *quinquefolia* Wood-anemone

Perennial. White flowers in April to early May, one inch in diameter, with petal-like sepals (usually five) and numerous pistils and stamens, borne singly on four- to eight-inch stems above a whorl of three leaflets, each divided into three to five (more often) sharply toothed lobes. Reverse of each sepal is pink to reddish, so flower buds appear pink. Forms large colonies in rich, moist woods in the high shade or filtered shade of deciduous trees. Rhode Island native.

Propagation

From seed: Wood-anemones most often grow in large, clonal colonies that are probably self-sterile, and seeds are not easily found. If seeds are found in early summer, sow immediately or store moist. Germination requires treatment with several cycles of cool and warm temperatures (40°F; 70°F; 40°F; 70°F).

By division: Division of the creeping underground stems (rhizomes) is the best way to multiply Wood-anemone. Mark the location of the flowering colonies in spring and after plants go dormant in summer, carefully dig with a spading fork, lifting out the tiny brown rhizomes. Transfer the entire clump in the spading fork to a new spot with rich organic soil and partial shade, setting it into the ground at a depth and orientation similar to its original location. The rhizomes are small and brittle, so they can be hard to locate and will break easily.

Anemonella thalictroides (L.) Spach Rue-anemone

Perennial. White or pinkish stalked flowers in April to June, about one inch in diameter, with five to ten petal-like sepals, held in clusters in a small umbel above a pair or whorl of compound leaves, each with three round-lobed leaflets on a four- to eight-inch stem. Moist or dry woods in dappled shade. Rhode Island native.

Propagation

From seed: Collect seeds in early summer as they become ripe and sow them immediately, since viability drops quickly. Germination requires alternating cycles of warm, moist stratification followed by cold stratification (70°F; 40°F; 70°F). Seedlings may bloom the first season.

By division: This is the easiest way to multiply this plant. Underground stems (tubers) can be carefully dug and detached from the crown after plants go dormant in summer. Be sure to take only the largest pieces that have a stem bud. Avoid rotting by placing them near the surface when transplanting. Some beautiful white and pink double-flowered cultivars are available commercially, including the white *Flora Plena* and the pink *Cameo*. These are all sterile, however, so tuber division is the only way to multiply them in your garden. If garden soil is highly acidic, a sprinkling of lime is beneficial.

RIWPS Policy

Never dig plants in the wild or without the written permission of the landowner.

Take seeds sparingly.

References

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