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Wildflowers—White Fawn Lily ~ Brenan Simpson

Probably everyone who loves flowers has one particular favourite. Mine happens to be one which begins to bloom around the second half of April. It has several common names: Easter Lily, White Fawn Lily, White Trout Lily and even Dog Tooth Violet, although it's not a violet and it takes a great deal of imagination to find any part of it which looks like a dog's tooth. I prefer the name 'White Fawn Lily,' partly because there is another flower which is also known as an 'Easter Lily,' but mainly because the petals of this one are really white, the leaves are spotted with olive/brown markings, rather like a fawn and the plant does actually belong to the lily family, all of which makes the name fairly appropriate.

Usually a single flower, comprising six white petals, grows on top of a stem about five inches above a pair of spotted leaves, but sometimes three or even four flowers can come from a single stem. As the blooms age, the tips of the petals start to curl upwards and the whole flower opens out.

The White Fawn Lily grows on mossy slopes in light shade on all of our Islands, but unfortunately it is becoming more and more rare as development takes over its habitat. Those who took the trouble to look at the poster of endangered plants which was mentioned in an earlier column will remember that this lily was one of those listed on it. Its major predator is the human race, for in addition to crushing it beneath buildings, many people try to dig it up and transplant it to their gardens. The move is seldom successful and generally results merely in the death of more of these beautiful plants.

The botanical name of the White Fawn Lily is *Erythronium oregonum*. There is a pink variety of the species, *Erythronium revolutum*, also endangered, which can be found on Vancouver Island and which grows abundantly in a very beautiful little wild flower reserve near Honeymoon Bay on Lake Cowichan. Two alpine varieties, *Erythronium montanum*, whose common name is the Avalanche Lily and *Erythronium grandiflorum*, or Glacier Lily, can both be found at higher altitude on Vancouver

Island and the Olympic peninsula. Neither of these, however, has the mottled leaves of the Fawn Lilies.

A second spring wildflower is one which, although not yet endangered here, has been almost totally eradicated in England, thanks to the gullibility of the general public. Believing the



Photo: Brenan Simpson

propaganda of the makers of herbicides, individuals, in order to conform to what they are told that a lawn should look like and municipalities, so that seeds of this plant do not spread back onto those perfect lawns, have spent millions of pounds to buy the products of the chemical companies to kill this 'weed'. The sales campaign has been so successful that concerned plant lovers have had to form a society specifically aimed at the preservation of this wild flower, which is not only pretty to look at but has also proved useful medicinally for a whole variety of ills. On top of that, it can be eaten as a salad vegetable, used as a coffee substitute and brewed into wine. One type of this plant was even used as a source of rubber during the Second World War. Its name? *Taraxacum officinale*. Because of the shape of its leaves, the French call it 'Dent-de-lion' or Lion's tooth. To us, it's the Dandelion.

Brenan's wildflower articles are also published as a book *Flowers at My Feet: West Wildflowers in Legend, Literature and Lore.* ✍

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