



A Little About the Shamrock



St. Patrick's Day is just around the corner - and the shamrock is always associated with it and Ireland. This tender perennial has quite a history and lore that surrounds it. We all know the story of when St Patrick introduced Christianity to Ireland; he used the shamrock to illustrate the Holy Trinity. There was a time when wearing a shamrock was potentially punishable by death - the Irish Rebellion of 1798 was such a time. There are many other stories of the shamrock that abound.

The name shamrock comes from the Irish Gaelic seamróg, which is the diminutive of the Irish word for clover (seamair) and means simply "little clover" or "young clover".

In Ireland, shamrock usually refers to either the species *Trifolium dubium* (lesser clover) or *Trifolium repens* (white clover). However, other three-leaved plants are sometimes called shamrocks. There is still not a consensus over the precise botanical species of clover that is the "true" shamrock; however, lesser clover is considered to be the "shamrock" by over half the Irish people.

White clover has trifoliate leaves; sometimes a fourth leaf will grow making it the "four-leaf clover" - and for the person that finds it good luck abounds!

You can currently find the American ornamental version of the shamrock, *Oxalis tetraphylla*, at nurseries and grocery stores. *Oxalis tetraphylla*, a perennial bulb, is hardy in the USDA zones 8 to 9; it is more commonly grown as a house plant.

Oxalis tetraphylla, known as lucky clover or shamrock plant, is native to Mexico, and is not a clover at all, but resembles a green four-leaf clover with an iron cross-shaped purple coloration in the center.

It prefers cool air, bright indirect light, and moist well drained soil. When the lucky clover plant's leaves start to die back, it is going into its dormant state. Reduce/stop watering once the plant shows signs of dormancy and resume when new growth emerges.

Most lucky clovers have beautiful tiny flowers and different cultivars come in a variety of stunning leaf colors as well as flower colors. Interestingly enough, the leaves close up at night and opens up when the light returns.

Note: *Oxalis tetraphylla* (lucky clover) is listed as a non-invasive ornamental plant. There are some species of oxalis in California (*Oxalis corniculata*, or creeping wood-sorrel; *Oxalis pes-caprae*, or Bermuda buttercup, is another) that are considered noxious weeds, but *Oxalis tetraphylla* (lucky clover) is not. However, we recommend that lucky clover be grown as a container plant and not planted in the garden.

So now that you know how to care for the enduring shamrock, put a little beauty and luck into your life!

For each petal on the shamrock

This brings a wish your way

Good health, good luck and happiness for today and everyday.

Happy St. Patrick's Day