

Bowman's Root, *Gillenia trifoliata*

By Joyce Tuharsky

Bowman's Root features clusters of ethereal, white, five-petaled blossoms that will dance and whirl in the slightest wind. It is one of the loveliest of native perennials yet rarely seen in gardens. Not only is it handsome and hardy, it is also long-lived!

A member of the Rosaceae (Rose) family, Bowman's Root has a slender, loose, informal form that grows 2-3 feet tall from a woody rootstock. In late spring, it is topped with dainty white flowers that are shaped like loose stars, 1-3 inches wide, on wiry red stems. After the petals fall, the attractive red sepals (outer flower part) persist. The foliage is bronze when it first emerges, then turns an olive green with a play of red in the petioles. The handsome Astilbe-like, trifoliate leaves are finely-cut, serrated, compound, and alternate—turning shades of burgundy to orange in the fall. Bowman's Root is a clump-forming plant that will spread 1.5 to 3 feet. Its interesting shape, unique seedheads and upright, wire-like stems provide textural interest through winter.



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Bowman's root is native to the eastern US and Canada from southern Ontario to Georgia, including Michigan. It often grows in quality habitats under a canopy of mature oak trees, in upland or mountainous woodland regions, along rocky slopes, or in savannas or limestone glades. It is especially valued by many species of native bees, but also attracts nectar-seeking butterflies, skippers, and flies. This plant is deer resistant (toxic to herbivores) and pest and disease free.



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Bowman's root is an underused, all-round, native plant that becomes more beautiful over the years. It harmonizes well with shrubs and grasses, makes a lovely backdrop plant for shorter perennials, and can be easily integrated into herbaceous beds and borders. Used in mass plantings or as a specimen, its standout white flowers become a striking focus at the edge of a forest or in a shady corner of your

garden. The pretty foliage adds interest and color all year round; and Bowman's root is a great cut flower, lasting long in a vase.

Although it can take time to establish, Bowman's Root is worth the wait. It is adaptable to many different soils, as long as the soil is well-drained and kept moist. Young plants in particular should be watered regularly. Bowman's Root prefers partial shade, can cope with sunny places, but not blazing sun. It also likes nutrient-rich and pH neutral to slightly acidic soil. Once established, Bowman's root becomes drought tolerant. It also tolerates tree root competition if it has a nice layer of organic mulch. Early spring, when the first green shoots begin showing, is a good time to cut prior year's stems to the ground.

Bowman's Root can be propagated by seed or division, but is easiest propagated by cuttings taken in spring. Put cuttings in water. After roots form, place young plants in soil, making sure that at least the lowest pair of leaves is below the surface of the earth.

For more information:

[Gillenia trifoliata \(Bowman's root\) | Native Plants of North America \(wildflower.org\)](#)

[Gillenia trifoliata | North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox \(ncsu.edu\)](#)

[Bowman's root - planting, care and tips - live-native.com](#)