Native Plant of the Month

Wood Sorrel

*Oxalis oregana*

- Lewis and Clark noted this plant in the woods of Oregon as being similar in taste to the Eurasian salad plant “sorrel,” with its tangy, tart taste. Hence, its common name, and part of its scientific (Oregon).
- Its high content of oxalic acid provides the rest of its scientific name.
- Deer and small herbivores dine on the leaves and flowers in small quantities, as oxalic acid is potentially harmful.
- The leaves will fold back sharply in direct sun, during the night, or in rainfall as an interesting, protective response.

Landscape Value

Wood sorrel is an excellent evergreen groundcover in the woodland garden. It needs to be placed correctly otherwise it may grow happily out of bounds.

It thrives in deep shade, and will tolerate dry summer conditions, so it is a prime candidate for the understory of existing trees and shrubs, or along the north side of buildings. It is best placed in areas bounded by walkways or other borders to keep it from spreading too far by underground rhizomes.

Flowers appear in spring and fall, and the new leaves and flowers are tasty additions to salads. Their oxalic acid is present in many foods, and is considered safe in small quantities.

Text by Heidi Bohan
©Starflower Foundation