

ERYTHRONIUMS IN CULTIVATION

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*Erythronium californicum*





### **Erythronium californicum**

Erythronium californicum filaments are narrow, ribbon-like with milky white pollen, the flowers are also creamy white with a yellow centre; some forms have dark red zig zag patterns around the centre.



Erythronium californicum is another excellent garden plant which is most often seen under the cultivar name of Erythronium 'White Beauty' this is readily available.

I include 'White Beauty' here, rather than under *hybrids*, as there are no morphological indications that any other species is involved.

What makes this form such a good garden plant is its ability to tolerate a wide range of garden types and increase well by division: a healthy well-grown bulb can make two new flowering sized bulbs plus have several smaller offsets every year – it also regularly sets seed.

**Erythronium 'White Beauty'**

**Erythronium  
californicum**

All forms are free flowering, setting seed most years provided the weather conditions at flowering time are not too cold and wet. Erythronium 'White Beauty' has fewer seeds in the capsule compared to other forms; about one third of the number.

**Erythronium californicum seeds**

**Bulb**

On the left is a group of *Erythronium californicum* bulbs showing the typical shape – the longer thin ones are younger bulbs still taking themselves down into the ground seeking the best conditions.

Most forms will increase by offsets, soon forming clumps – forms such as ‘White Beauty’ form clumps quickly, see below, and are best lifted and divided every three to five years to maintain good flowering.



***Erythronium californicum***



***Erythronium* ‘White Beauty’ bulbs with multiple offsets.**



**Erythronium 'White Beauty'**

### Leaves

The leaves are very similar to those of *Erythronium revolutum* and *Erythronium oregonum* with varying degrees of dark markings - the best of which can be very dramatic.





A group of seedlings showing variation in the leaf pattern some with more dark areas than others.



Here is a clone selected from Erythronium 'White Beauty' seedlings which had darker marked leaves than the parent and was more vigorous perhaps as it was a much younger clone.

I distributed this form under the name Erythronium 'Craigton Beauty'.

Erythronium californicum is an excellent garden plant that is easy to grow, easy to get hold of plus it also increases well.



**Erythronium californicum**



It should be noted when raising *Erythronium californicum* from seed that you should check the resulting seedlings carefully when they first flower as it is a promiscuous species, hybridising readily with many other Western North American species.

Such hybrids can be very attractive, in fact many make very good garden plants as they can grow in an even wider range of garden and weather conditions than the pure species.

**Erythronium californicum**

*Erythronium citrinum*



**Erythronium citrinum**

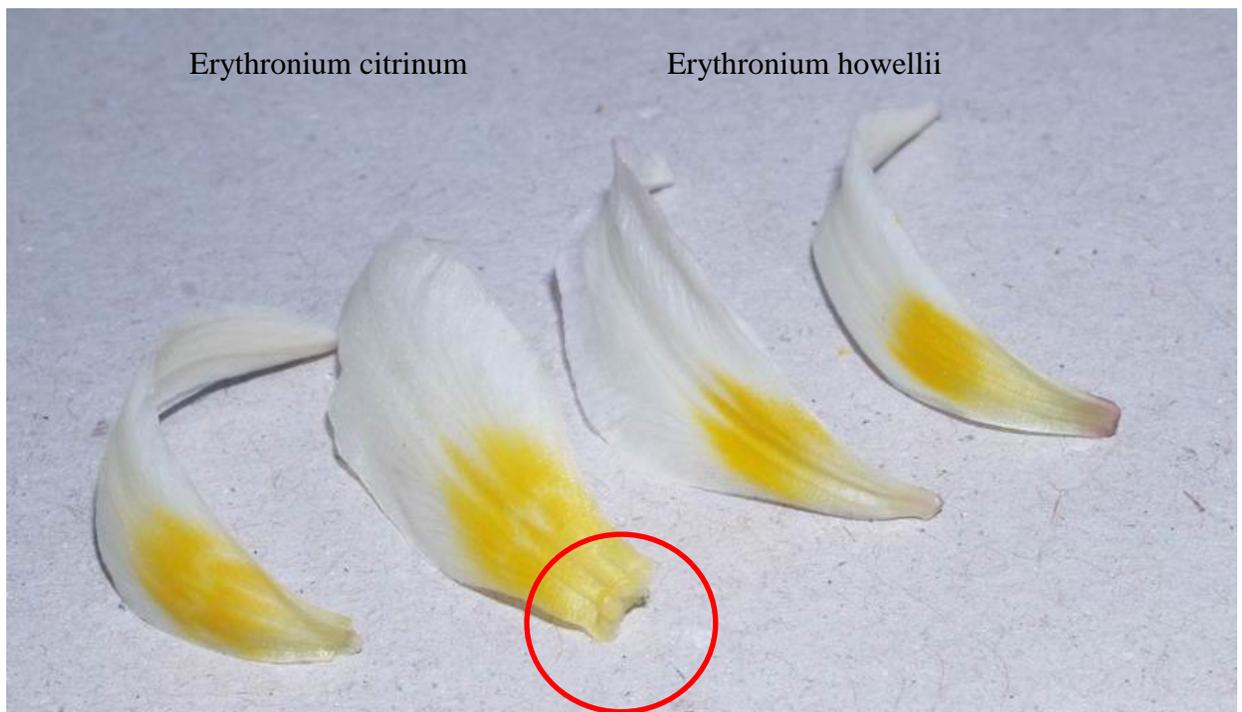
Erythronium citrinum is one of a number of Erythroniums that are basically white with a yellow centre.

This would not be among the first species I would recommend to the regular gardener : Erythronium oregonum and Erythronium californicum provide similar colours and are more robust garden plants, however for the enthusiastic growers Erythronium citrinum is a charming species.

Erythronium citrinum has white flowers, with some degree of citrus yellow colour towards the centre with matching white pollen – the filaments are narrow and there are swollen appendages at the base of the petals.

The species that it is most likely to be confused with is Erythronium howellii which shares most of the same features but does not possess the swollen appendages.

On the right are one inner and one outer floral segment from both Erythronium citrinum and Erythronium howellii with the swollen structure on the former circled.





**Erythronium citrinum**

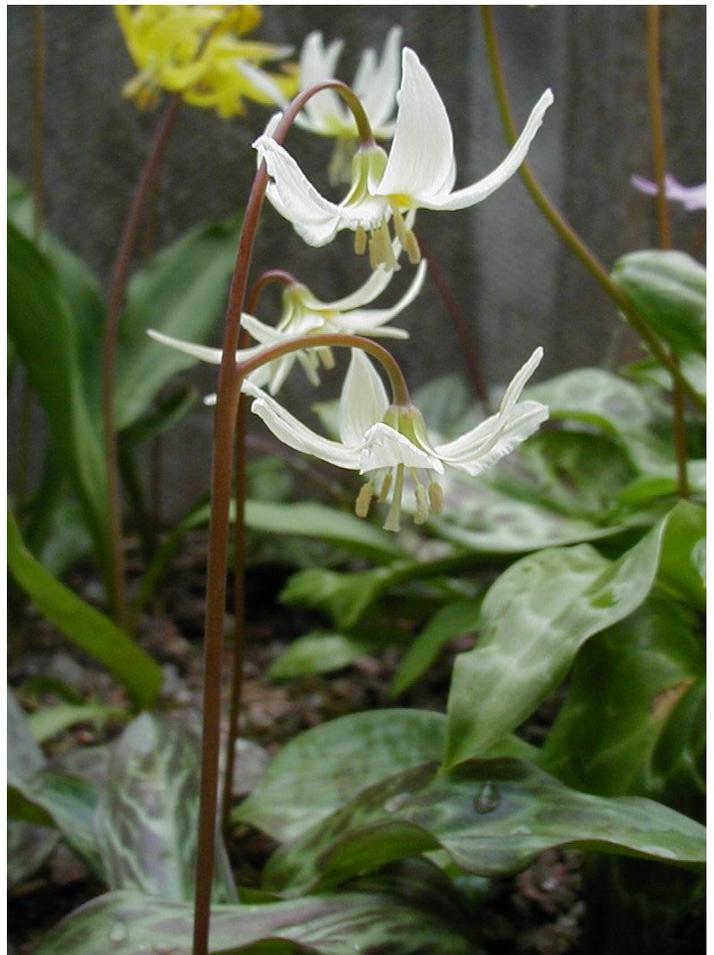


**Erythronium howellii**

Another difference I have noted is in the shape of the flowers - when they are open *Erythronium citrinum* flowers open wider revealing more of the stamens, style and ovary when viewed from the side while the base of *Erythronium howellii* always remains more bell-like, wrapped around these parts of the flower.



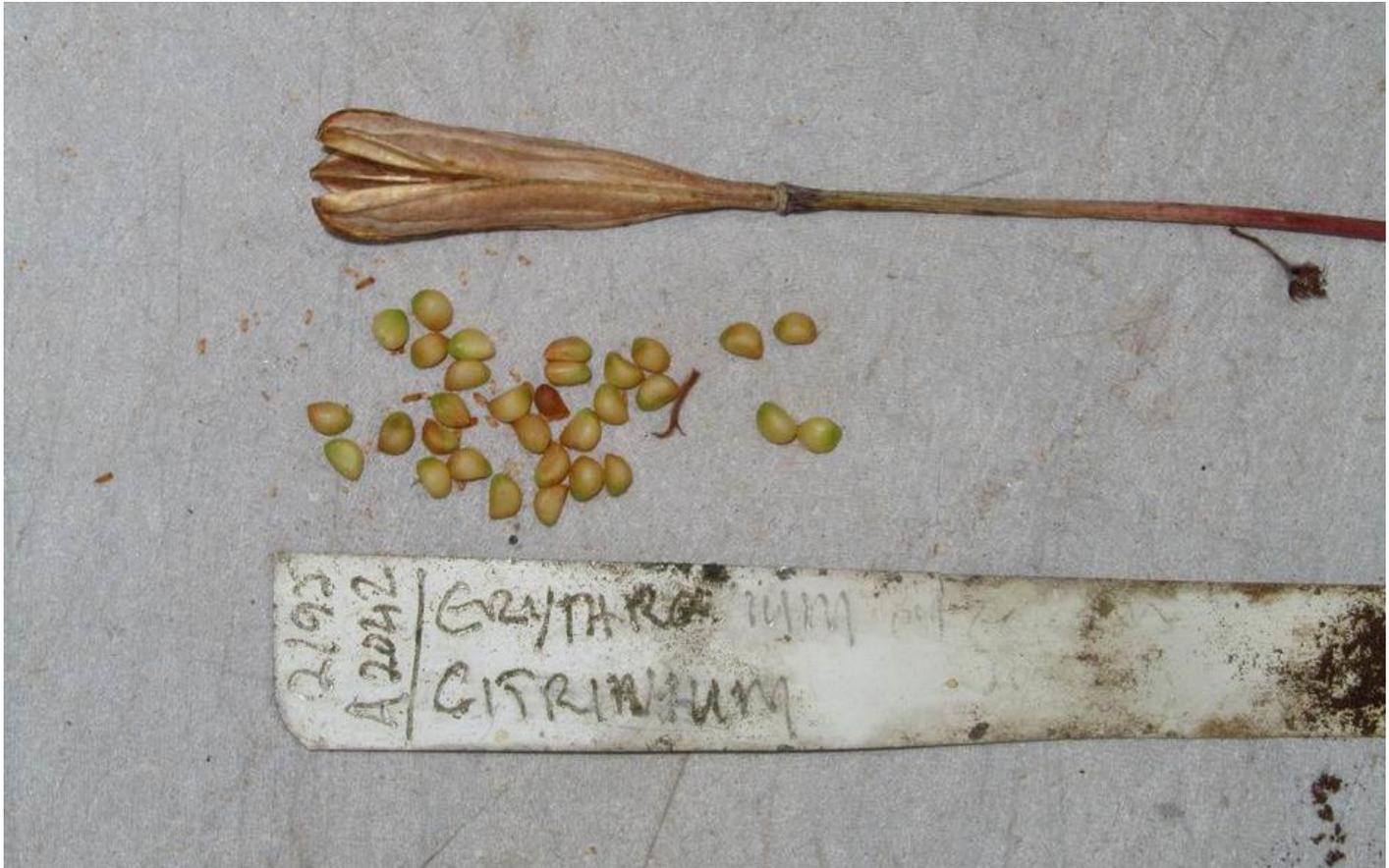
**Erythronium citrinum**



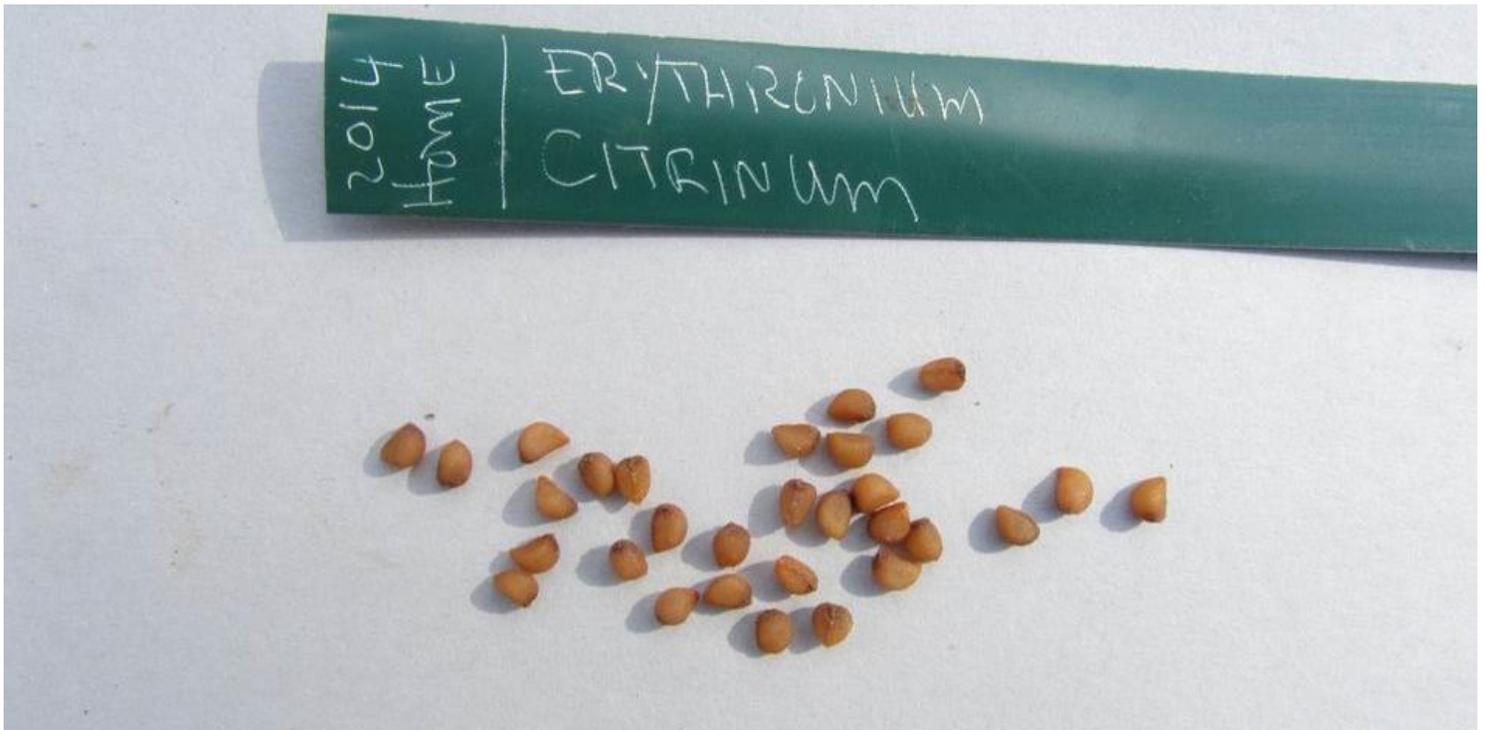
**Erythronium howellii**

Looking at the two species in flower you become able to tell them apart from the shape of the flower and a quick check inside for the presence or absence of the swollen appendages will confirm which species it is.

## Seed



Seed is the best way to increase this species and you can expect around thirty seeds from a well fertilised capsule.



I store the seed dry in paper packets over the summer, ideally sowing it at the end of August after soaking it overnight. Above you see the same seed as in the previous picture which has now been soaked ready for sowing – In the picture below is the resulting germination the following spring.



*Erythronium howellii* and *Erythronium citrinum* seedlings photographed on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2015.

### Bulb

A group of typical *Erythronium citrinum* bulbs – you will note that there are no new offsets just the remains of the previous year's growth attached at the base of the new bulb. In my experience this is another species that does not increase readily by division.



Leaves



*Erythronium citrinum* leaves



**Erythronium citrinum**



### ***Erythronium citrinum* var *roderickii***

A number of years ago a new variety was named *Erythronium citrinum* var *roderickii* after the late Wayne Roderick: its distinguishing feature is the dark anthers which reveal brown pollen when they dehisce. I find this to be the most beautiful variation.

I have seen a number of plants of *Erythronium citrinum* in the UK which, on close inspection, appear to be hybrids, many have dark pattern lines around the central yellow zone – these plants do clump up quite well.

*Erythronium citrinum* is a relatively easily grown species and being that bit smaller in stature is ideally suited to growing among smaller plants on our rock garden.



**Erythronium citrinum**

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*Erythronium howellii*



**Erythronium howellii**



**Erythronium howellii**

*Erythronium howellii* has a white flower with a yellow central zone and is very similar to *Erythronium citrinum* – the key differences are that the swollen appendages on the petals are absent on this species and also in the way the flower opens, see under *Erythronium citrinum* for more details.



### **Erythronium howellii**

The flowers are white to creamy white as are the anthers and pollen - varying degrees of yellow in the throat give it an attractive appearance.

As with many white flowers they often take on a pink colour as they age and the anthocyanins develop.





**Seed**

Seed freshly harvested from the garden will be stored in paper packets before it is soaked and sown towards the end of the summer.

The same seed is now soaked and ready for sowing and below are the seedlings germinating the following April.

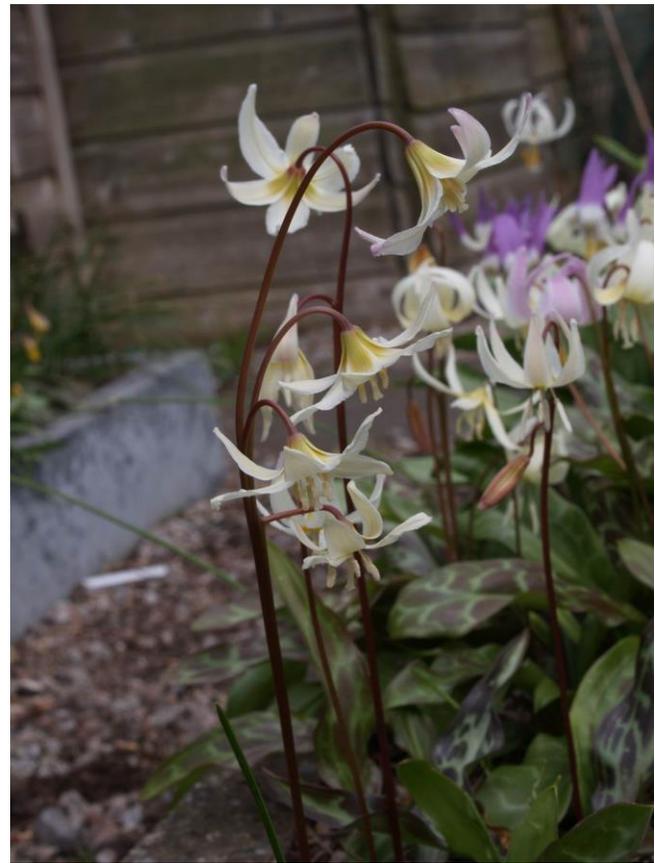


**Erythronium howellii seedlings**



Mature plants of *Erythronium howellii* will have multiple flowers on a stem; we mostly get four in our garden.

This is another species that offers no real difficulties growing in a number of beds in our garden but like *Erythronium citrinum* it is best suited to the beds containing smaller plants.



***Erythronium howellii***



***Erythronium howellii***