

TROLLIUS

Sue Hough

The trollius family is made up of about 30 species, and its common name in the UK is 'globeflower'. The name trollius originates from an old German word for describing something globular: *Trol* or *Trolen*, which is rarely used in modern day German. The French refer to it as 'boule d'or'. In Scotland it is known as lucken-gowan or cabbage daisy, and this name has gradually drifted down into northern counties of England. The colouration of trollius flowers can vary between pale yellow, bright yellow and orange, and sometimes even a lilac hue.

The globular form of the flowers were described in Gerard's Herbal of 1633 as '*...very faire yellow floures, consisting of few leaves folded or rolled up together like a round ball or globe: whereupon it was called Ranunculus globosus or the Globe Crow-foot, or Globe floure*'.

The natural habitat for trollius is in the cool temperate climates of the northern hemisphere, where they thrive mostly on heavy wet clay soils. Their incurving petals (which form a tight ball) and their textured leaves give them an air of sophistication over the ordinary field buttercup often seen alongside streams and in moist meadows. All trollius are poisonous to livestock, but they are usually avoided by cattle as they have an acrid taste.

Trollius does provide food for some wildlife, and the larvae of the *Xanthorhoe montanata*, the silver-ground carpet moth, is one that thrives on them. The larvae are coloured grey with a purplish-brown back. The colouring of the mature moth is white with a grey, almost black, band across its wings, which can span up to 33mm across. This species can be found from Ireland to eastern Russia.



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Xanthorhoe montanata,
the silver-ground carpet moth

Of about 54 trollius varieties listed in the RHS Plant Finder 2017, only two are marked as widely available: *T. chinensis* 'Golden Queen' and *T. x cultorum* 'Alabaster'. The remaining varieties are listed by just a few nurseries. During my research into plant availability for our Hampshire Group Conservation scheme, I found that the number of plants actually available via nurseries listed in the Plant Finder is very limited.

I have selected four globeflowers which give a small insight into the different forms and colour variation.

T. chinensis 'Golden Queen' has deep orange flowers with an even darker orange tuft in its centre. The flowers appear from May to June and it grows up to 90cm tall. It is suitable for the edge of a pond or the middle of a moist border, but as it likes its head in the sun. A thick mulch around the stems helps prevent the roots drying out.



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T. chinensis 'Golden Queen'

T. x cultorum 'New Moon'. This delicate trollius, with its ivory-touched green flowers, makes a refreshing sight in the late spring border. It was introduced by Jelitto Perennial Seeds in 2011. They received seed from the renowned nurseryman Coen Jansen, of the Netherlands, who had been working on *T.* 'Alabaster' to make a stronger, more reliable plant.

T. 'Alabaster' was originally bred by the famous Georg Arends Nursery in Wuppertal, Germany. The 2018 RHS Plant Finder shows 46 nurseries offering *T.* 'Alabaster' and 20 nurseries listing *T.* 'New Moon', so it looks as if *T. x cultorum* 'Alabaster' still has the edge for the moment.



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T. x cultorum 'New Moon'

T. europaeus. A perennial herb of cool, damp habitats, including hay meadows, stream and river banks, lake margins, open woodland and rock ledges. It prefers basic soils, and is often associated with limestone. It is sensitive to grazing, but can persist as small, non-flowering plants in the uplands. (Stuic, S. Aberdeen).

This lovely species has become increasingly rare in Britain since 1930, especially at the fringes of its range, which includes Scotland, Wales and northern England. The main reason for its decline is the draining of hillsides for agricultural use, and the use of fertilisers.



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T. europaeus

T. stenopetalus. This is not a commonly found plant. It has incised, palmate, lobed leaves which form on branching stems. The yellow flowers appear in May-June and are multi-petalled, forming an open habit, but not as fully as other trollius species. It prefers semi-shade and, like all globeflowers, moisture at its feet.



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T. stenopetalus

Sourced Bibliography:

- The Botanic Garden* by B. Maund, F.L.S 1829-30
- Dorset Perennials (*Trollius* 'New Moon')
- The Online Atlas of British and Irish Flora*
- Jelitto Seed Global Plants