

## Focus on a Native: Columbine

By CMG Betty J



Columbine, *Aquilegia canadensis*, is an erect perennial known for its showy, nodding red and yellow flowers. Also called Eastern Red Columbine and Wild Columbine, this is a beautiful woodland wildflower that also grows well in the shaded portions of a residential landscape. In addition to its flowers, Columbine also sports three-lobed, attractive leaves.

The bell-like flowers have backward-pointing tubes or spurs that contain nectar and attract long-tongued insects and hummingbirds. Each flower is about 1" long and 1 ½" wide. The cluster of spurs is joined at the base and numerous stamens protrude from the center. Each flower grows at the end of an individual stem about 2' tall. Leaves grow alternately on the stem in groups of three leaflets. Many basal leaves form a compact clump at the base.



Ideal growing conditions include sandy, well-drained loams and limestone-based soils, but these plants do not thrive in soils that are too rich. Nutrient-rich garden soil encourages extensive vegetative growth with weak stems and may shorten the plant's lifespan. In central Texas this is an evergreen perennial unless the temperature exceeds 110<sup>0</sup> F or -10<sup>0</sup>F. These extreme temperatures will cause the leaves to go dormant until the temperature stabilizes.

The native range of Wild Columbine is from central Canada through much of the eastern United States. The populations in central Texas in the southern and eastern edges of the Hill Country are disjunct from the rest of the range. Bees, butterflies, hummingbirds and seed-eating birds are attracted to the flowers and seeds. It is the larval host to the Columbine Duskywing. Bloom time is March through May.