Mayapple, Mandrake *Podophyllum peltatum* - Berberidaceae (Barberry family)

**Habitat**
Mayapple is an indigenous plant of eastern North America extending westward to Minnesota and Texas. It prefers moist, fertile soils of woodlands and pastures.

![Habitat of Mayapple, Mandrake. *Podophyllum peltatum* - Berberidaceae (Barberry family).](image)

**Description**
Mayapple is a perennial herb, 1.5 to 2 feet (0.5 to 0.60 meters) tall, with a simple stem bearing two large umbrella-shaped, five to nine lobed, hairless leaves. A single, white, nodding, flower, with six to nine petals is produced at the junction of the two leaf stems. The fruit is a 1 to 2 inch (2.5 to 5 cm) fleshy berry that turns yellow when ripe (Fig. 3-35). The plant spreads by a fibrous creeping root system.

![Figure 3-35. Mayapple, mandrake (*Podophyllum peltatum*).](image)

**Principal Toxin**
Podophyllin, a bitter, resinous compound, is found in all parts
of the plant. The ripe yellow fruit, however, is edible. Podophyllin acts as an irritant and has strong laxative properties. It also interferes with cell division and may have anticancer properties. Livestock generally will not eat the plant unless deprived of their normal forages. Human poisoning occurs more commonly when unripe may apples are eaten or when parts of the plant are inappropriately used as a medicinal herb.

Clinical Signs
Colic and diarrhea are the major signs of mayapple poisoning. Excessive salivation and swelling of the muzzle, intermandibular area, and eyelids may result from the irritant effects of the resinous toxin. Excitement lasting about a day is a reported symptom of mayapple poisoning. Most animals will recover once they are prevented from eating the plant.