



Lucky shamrocks, wearin' o' the green... Whether you have any Irish heritage or not, a bit o' that green is always welcome, especially while we finish this tedious slog toward spring. Historically, that green was represented by the four leafed clover - bringing hope, faith, love, and luck to the finder. As an added bonus – it was used to ward off evil. If you are looking for a true “shamrock” plant to celebrate either St. Patrick’s Day or just to add some grace to life in general, it can only be *Trifolium repens* (clover). But, if you want to cheat a bit and just enjoy a bit of fun try a plant or two from the *Oxalis* genus – referred to as the shamrock plant in the retail world. Often, this is the only time of the year that these fun plants can readily be found for sale. Take advantage of this retail opportunity to add some fun to an outdoor or indoor collection of plants.

If you love to look for four-leafed clovers, plant some of the true shamrock - *Trifolium repens* (clover). *T. repens* can take a lot of abuse in this area’s outdoor arena. Most are perennially hardy for the northern climates, but always double check the specific cultivar requirements before purchasing. There are many variations in leaf and flower color to choose from but, one that is particularly fetching is *Trifolium repens* ‘*Purpurascens*’ - has lovely green edging surrounding a deep red-purple heart and has been bred to produce lots of leaves with three and four leaflets. Contrary to common turf junkie beliefs, clovers remain excellent additions to any area of tough clay and/or low soil nitrogen content. They will tolerate a slight variety of light situations, mow well, love areas of poor health - fixing nitrogen into those depleted soils. The only drawback is that they can be a bit troublesome to get rid of until soil health returns to a higher level. So, do be careful when choosing and planting.

*Oxalis regnellii* (shamrock), *O. triangularis* (purple shamrock), and *O. deppei* (iron cross) are a few of the more commonly found “shamrock” species for sale around St. Patrick’s Day. For the northern regions, these are definitely winter houseplants but can certainly be used outside when the day and evening temps get a pinch warmer. Check the zonal tolerance carefully if you want to use these for more than one season of fun. All have similar trifoliate (three leaflets) leaf structure. Breeding work has provided lovely leaf colors in everything from mottled

green and creamy white to deep purple-maroon. All have delicate, upright flowers in complementary tones.

*Oxalis* is a not finicky plant in general, and, as a houseplant offer an opportunity to place in locations that would kill most tropicals. They love cool evenings (55 degrees F) and relatively moderate day temps (75 degrees F), and will be quite satisfied if placed next to a cool outdoor window. Consistent light conditions from partial to full sun are appreciated, but *Oxalis* is known to adapt to almost any light situation except total deep shade. These tuberous rooted plants prefer moderate moisture in a well-drained soil media - too much water may cause root rot resulting in increased leaf discoloration and loss, lower levels of flower production, and eventually, a dead plant. No standing water! Water thoroughly when the top quarter of the plant is dry, allowing excess water to drain. These plants will tolerate a lot of dry soil before completely succumbing to a droughty death. If you are one of those people that wait until a plant wilts before watering – initially this one will throw you for a loop. *Oxalis* leaves will fold down slightly toward the stem as evening approaches, giving the plant an appearance of water wilt. Don’t be fooled by this and do the caring thing – water more. The plant is only resting at the end of the day.

Over a long growing season, *Oxalis* plants change and mature, experiencing some natural flower, stem, and leaf dieback. Don’t worry. These are natural occurrences usually precipitating a complete dormancy, which may happen a few times throughout the course of one year. When dormancy sets in, cut the stems back, stop watering, and place the plant into a cool, dark room. Check the plant every two weeks, or so, to see if the stems have begun to sprout. When the stems do begin to show some growth activity, bring the plants back into their happy place and resume care. They should re-flower within a month or so. Fertilizing should only be done during these active growing periods. Any other time is unnecessary, and it may inhibit leaf and flower development.