

Linaceae

flax family

There are 200 species of flax and relatives, clustered in only six genera. Most are herbaceous, with simple, sessile leaves. Their flowers are aggregated into cymes, panicles or racemes. Regular flowers are perfect and hypogynous, 4–5-merous. Sepals are distinct; petals unite to form a tube. Fruits are septate capsules.

Key to genera

Flowers 5-merous; sepals entire or toothed. *Linum*

Flowers 4-merous; sepals with 3 lobes, across their summit. *Radiola*

***Linum* L.**

flax

Cosmopolitan, there are 200 species worldwide. Staminodes are present in some species, alternating with the stamens. Sepals are marked with 1–5 veins, usually ciliate. Leaves are very narrow, linear or oblanceolate.

Key to species

Petals blue; fruit 5–20mm thick. *Linum usitatissimum*

Petals white; fruit <6mm thick. *L. catharticum*

***Linum catharticum* L.**

Fairy Flax; lin purgatif



Photos by Sean Blaney

Very slender, this plant bears tiny opposite cauline leaves. Tiny white flowers are distant in a tenuous panicle. Plants are glabrous.

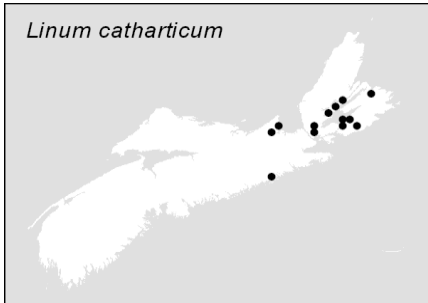
Flowers from June to August.

Grows on moist, seepy ground, as on hillsides, banks or other grassy areas.



Scattered along the Northumberland shores to eastern Cape Breton.

An introduced species from Europe. NF to ON, south to MI and PA.



***Linum usitatissimum* L.**

Common Flax; lin cultivé



Photo by Martin Thomas

Glabrous and erect, plants may reach 60cm tall. This species is more robust than the previous one. Narrow leaves may be elliptic or linear, their margins entire. Flowers are borne in a loosely branched panicle. Sepals are elliptic or ovate and prominently ribbed. Petals are nearly square, bluish to purple.

Flowers July and August.

Dry sterile soils of fallow ground, railbeds and roadsides.

Once widely planted for its fibrous stems (linen), not long-persistent. Collections from central Nova Scotia are historic. Recently collected from Kings and Halifax counties, roadside and at site of former grain elevators.

Widely planted after introduction from Europe, throughout



Photo by Martin Thomas

the continent, from the high Arctic southward.

***Radiola* Hill.**

Tiny All-seed

A monotypic genus, minute in size, at least in Nova Scotia. Freely-branching from the base, these plants produce flowers less than 4mm wide. Their sepals are split at the top.

***Radiola linoides* Roth.**

Tiny All-seed; radiole faux-lin



Photo by David Mazerolle

Compact little tufted plant, rarely exceeding 5cm in height. Stems repeatedly branch in pairs. Plants bear tiny leaves that are nearly ovate. Flowers are crowded in a broad, leafy terminal inflorescence. A hand lens may be required to see the flowers.

Summer-flowering in July and August.

Crevices, dry, sandy or stony soil as on roadsides, old fields on coastal headlands.

Found along the coast from eastern Cape Breton to Brier Island; many offshore islands.

Introduced to North America from Europe. Limited to NS, NB and ME.