

Violaceae

violet family

Known by most as one of our earliest spring wild flowers, the violets are our single genus of a family with 800 species worldwide, divided into 16 genera. Typically, the flowers are perfect, but irregular and five-merous. Lowermost petal is modified into a spur. Lower two stamens have a spurlike nectary on the dorsal surface. Sepals are persistent. Fruit is a capsule. Leaves are alternate or whorled, toothed or lobed.

Viola L.

violet

Nearly 400 species are included in this genus of the north-temperate regions. They include pansies and Johnny-jump-ups, two much-loved annuals, which self-sow and thrive here. Hybrids are common. The pansy is a hybrid between *Viola tricolor* and several other European species.

Most produce showy flowers whose petals are unequal in size. The lateral two may be bearded, at least in the spring. Later in the season cleistogamous flowers are produced towards the base of the plant. White forms are not uncommon in the blue or violet forms, further muddling identification. Our species may have axillary flowers or those arising directly from the roots.

Flowers are required for certain identification to species.

Key to species

- | | |
|---|------------------------|
| A. Flowers arise directly from the base of the plant. | B |
| B. Flowers blue. | C |
| C. From long creeping rootstocks, 2–4mm thick at the top. | <i>Viola selkirkii</i> |
| cc. From short, stout rootstock, 3–10mm thick. | D |
| D. Leaves ovate or lanceolate, deeply incised teeth basally. | <i>V. sagittata</i> |
| dd. Leaves cordate, margins with rounded teeth. | E |
| E. Pedicels exceeding the length of the leaves; spurred petal shorter than the others, smooth; lateral petals with clavate hairs. | <i>V. cucullata</i> |
| ee. Pedicels shorter than the leaves; spurred petal equal in length to the | F |

	others; lateral petals with hairs not clavate.	
	F. Plant pubescent; leaves and sepals villous; early spring flowers	<i>V. soraria</i>
	ff. Plant mostly smooth; early summer flowers.	<i>V. nephrophylla</i>
bb. Flowers white.		G
	G. Leaves cordate or widely cordate; sinus present at base of the blade.	H
	H. Leaves kidney-shaped or rounded, round at the tip, thick and waxy or glossy; lateral petals beardless; stolons absent	<i>V. renifolia</i>
	hh. Leaves cordate, acute tip, thin; lateral petals bearded near the base; stolons long and thin.	I
	I. Leaves smooth on both sides; seeds black, 1–1.4mm long.	<i>V. macloskeyi</i>
	ii. Leaves puberulent on one surface; seeds brownish, 1.6–2.1mm long.	<i>V. blanda</i>
	gg. Leaves much longer than broad, square at the base or tapering to the petiole.	J
	J. Leaves lanceolate or linear, >3 times longer than broad, gradually tapering to the base.	<i>V. lanceolata</i>
	jj. Leaves ovate, angled at the base, < 3 times longer than broad.	<i>V. sublanceolata</i>
aa. Flowers arise from the leaf axils.		K
	K. Flowers with petals irregular in shape (violet-like); stipules entire or finely serrate.	L
	L. Petals yellow.	<i>V. pubescens</i>
	ll. Petals white to blue.	M
	M. Flowers white with violet veins; style forming a head; stipules entire and white, deciduous.	<i>V. canadensis</i>
	mm. Flowers blue; style slender, its tip recurved; stipules slightly toothed, green and persistent.	N
	N. Leaves acute; stipules ovate or lanceolate, serrated and bristly.	<i>V. labradorica</i>
	nn. Leaves blunt; stipules linear with a few teeth at the base.	<i>V. adunca</i>
kk. Flowers with petals regular (pansy-like); stipules large and deeply cleft or lobed.		O
	O. Petals 2–3 times longer than the sepals; flowers large,	<i>V. tricolor</i>

violet with yellow and sometimes white.
oo. Petals rarely longer than the sepals; flowers small and
pale yellow.

V. arvensis

***Viola adunca* JE Smith**



Photo by Martin Thomas

The leaves are broadly lanceolate, crenulate and with a basal sinus. Plants are puberulent throughout. The stipules are linear. Similar to *V. labradorica*, it tends to have fewer leaves. The purple flowers extend above the leaves.

Flowers during May and June.

Usually seen on cool shady damp sites in ravines or dripping seeps.

Uncommon and northern.

Ranges from NS to AK, south to Ca, NM and NY.

***Viola arvensis* Murr.**

Field Pansy; Wild Pansy; violette des champs

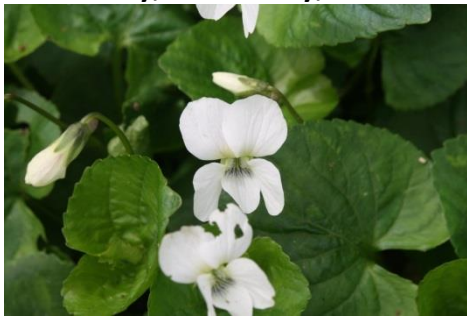


Photo by Ross Hall

Resembles our familiar *V. tricolor*, but this plant has white flowers, which may have purple or yellow marks. Sepals are nearly equal in length to the petals.

Long-flowering season, from April-September.

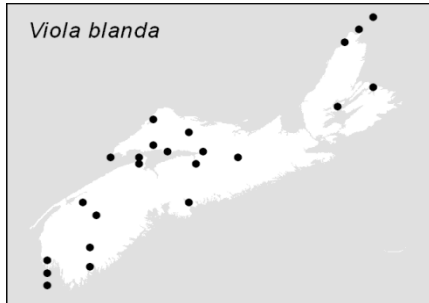
Frequents sterile soil as in fallow fields and roadsides. Only occasionally seen, Halifax and Aylesford and in Cumberland Co.

NF to BC, south to CA and variously to MS and GA; Greenland. Introduced from Europe, probably in uncleaned forage seed.

***Viola blanda* Willd.
(*V. incognita* Brainerd)
Sweet White Violet; violette agréable**



Photo by Martin Thomas



Leaves are similar to those of *V. macloskeyi* F. Lloyd. They are glabrous above and slightly pubescent below. Petioles and peduncles are also pubescent. Flowers are white with purple nectar guides. Our material is referenced to var. *palustriformis* A. Gray with the typical variety found south and west of NS.

Flowers early from May to early July.

Shady forests and thickets, especially in older deciduous forests.

Collected throughout, from Yarmouth Co., to northern Cape Breton, except for the eastern regions along the coast from Halifax to Sydney.

The species ranges from NF to SK, south to AL and GA.

***Viola canadensis* L.
Canada Violet; Tall White Violet**

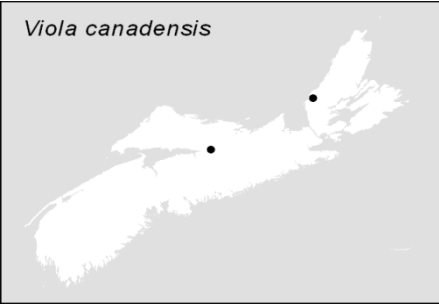


Photo by Marian Munro

Loosely branched, this tall violet bears broad ovate or rounded leaves on long petioles. Leaves are more profuse distally. Flowers may be white or cream with purple veins carried on short peduncles, arising from the axils of terminal leaf pairs.

Late April to July, sometimes as late as October.

Deciduous forests in calcareous soils.



Color map red

Very rare in Nova Scotia. Known only from Truro area, Newport Station and Mabou Falls, Inverness Co. and not seen in 50 years. May be extirpated in Nova Scotia.

Ranges from NS to AK, south to AZ and GA

STATUS: RED-listed in Nova Scotia.

***Viola cucullata* Aiton**
Blue Violet; violette cucullée



Photo by Martin Thomas

Bearing ovate or cordate leaves, this is one of our most commonly seen blue violets. Distinguishing characters include the clavate pubescence on the lateral petals. Flowers extend well-beyond the leaves. Variable in colour from pale blue or white with purple veins to deep purple. The sepals are also of variable length although var. *microtitis* Brainerd is no longer separated from the typical variety.

April flowers are not uncommon as late as July.

Wet seepy fields, swamp, beaches and in meadows.

Common throughout.

From NF to ON, south to AR and GA.



Photo by Sean Blaney

***Viola labradorica* Schrank**
(=*V. conspersa* Reichenb.)
Dog Violet; violette du Labrador



Freely branching, this species has its leaves broadly ovate, cordate at the base and crenate on the margins. Stipules are lanceolate and serrate. Petals are wide, pale violet in colour.

Flowers May until early July.

Swamps and alluvial meadows.

Photo by Martin Thomas



Photo by Martin Thomas

Northern, from Annapolis and Cumberland counties to northern Cape Breton. Common.

NF to NT and south to CO; FL.

***Viola lanceolata* L.**

Lance-leaved Violet; violette lancéolée



Photo by Martin Thomas

With lanceolate leaves tapering to the base, this violet is distinctive. The leaves may also be dimorphic; those developing in summer are much wider than those appearing with the flowers. Plant is smooth. Flowers are white.

May to July.

Bog pools in peaty soils, lakeshores.

Common in the southwestern half of the province, less frequent to Cumberland County and Cape Breton. Abundant on Sable Island.



Photo by Sean Blaney

Ranges from NF to ON, south to FL and TX; west coast.

***Viola macloskeyi* F. Lloyd**
Smooth White Violet; violette pâle



Photo by Martin Thomas

The broadly ovate or cordate leaves are smooth. Flowers are borne on long recurving peduncles. Their petals are white or yellowish, with the lower flowers marked with purple nectar guides. The sepals may be lanceolate or ovate. Our material belongs to ssp. *pallens* (Banks ex Ging) MS Baker.

Flowers from early April to July. Our earliest white violet.

Moist soils in meadows, bogs and along shores of ponds and lakes, often in full sunlight.

Common throughout.

NL to AK south to GA and CA. Nearly absent from the arid southwest.



Photo by Sean Blaney

***Viola nephrophylla* Greene**
violette néphrophylle



Photo by Sean Blaney

With its smooth ovate or kidney-shaped leaves, this species resembles several others, but for its later flowers. These are deep purple and do not exceed the leaves and sometimes even below them. Spurred petals are bearded. Lateral petals pubescent, but not with clavate hairs.

Flowers May to July.

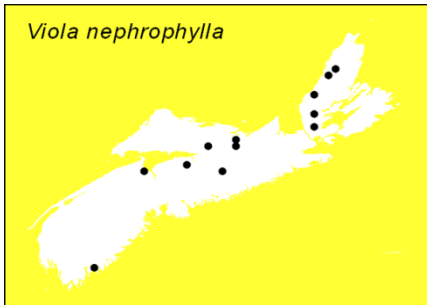
Cool, mossy sites: bogs, streamsides and wet woods.

Rare in Shelburne Co., Colchester and Cumberland counties northward. Generally a northern ranging species within NS.

NF to AK, south to CA, TX and WVA.



Photo by Martin Thomas



***Viola odorata* L.**, the English Violet may be found persisting for a short while after cultivation. It differs from *Viola cucullata* and *V. nephrophylla* in that its style is recurved, forming a hook, rather than swollen distally. It is usually associated with old gardens.

***Viola pubescens* Aiton**
Yellow Violet



Photo by David Mazerolle

One of our taller caulescent violets, it is distinctive with its yellow flowers. Plants may be finely pubescent or smooth. Leaves are broadly ovate, basally cordate and serrate or scalloped on the margins. Yellow flowers arise from the leaf axils, extending to or beyond the height of the leaves. Ours is referenced as ssp. *scabriuscula* Schwein ex T. & G.

Flowers during April and May.

Rich deciduous forests and on wooded slopes; intervalles.

Scattered and northern. North Mountain, Kings Co. and common in central NS. Typical in northern Cape Breton.

NS and PE west to SK, south to GA and OK.

***Viola renifolia* A. Gray**
violette réniforme



Photo by Martin Thomas

Typically the leaves of this species are lightly pubescent on both surfaces. Usually round or kidney-shaped in outline, they are rarely acute distally.

Flowers white, from May to July.

Coniferous forests over gypsum. Only occasionally on deep soils beneath mixed woods, or on slopes.



Photo by David Mazerolle

Scattered on the northern side from Annapolis Co. to northern Cape Breton.

NF to AK, south to CO and PA.

***Viola sagittata* Aiton**



Photo by Alain Belliveau

Plant is densely pubescent. Its leaves are crenate, and sometimes basally lobed. Both characters are highly variable.

Flowers April and May.

Sterile woods, clearing and fields.

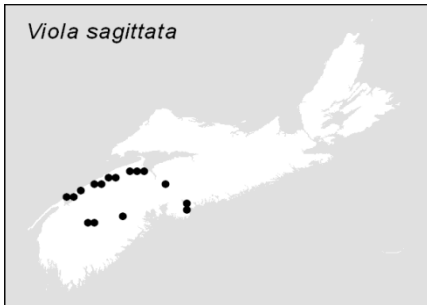
Common from Yarmouth to Halifax and Hants counties.

Hybrids form freely with *Viola septentrionalis*, producing robust plants with elongated leaves and fringed sepals. Often encountered on Cape Blomidon.

NS to ON, south to TX and GA.



Photo by Alain Belliveau



***Viola selkirkii* Pursh**

violette de Selkirk



Photo by Martin Thomas

Like many species, the leaves are ovate, cordate at the base. Differs in having the lobes on either side of the leaf sinus, overlapping. Flowers are several, only slightly exceeding the height of the leaves. It is often seen without flowers.

Flowers May to July.

Subalpine and alpine slopes and streamsides.

More northern than other violets, Kings and Cumberland County to northern Cape Breton. Local and rare.

NL to AK, south to PA, MI and CO: Greenland.

***Viola septentrionalis* Greene**

(=*V. sororia* Willd.)

violette septentrionale



Photo by Sean Blaney

A finely-pubescent species, it has variable leaves, ranging from ovate and acute to kidney-shaped. Violet flowers are hirsute on the lateral petals, subtended by lanceolate, ciliate sepals.

Flowers around the middle of May.

Lighter soils in fields, forests and rocky open barrens.

Common throughout.



Photo by David Mazerolle

Ranges across Canada, south to VA and TN.

***Viola sublanceolata* House**
violette sublancéolée



Photo by Martin Thomas

Leaves are distinctly wedge-shaped, broadly lanceolate and squared at the base, decurrent on the petiole. The species resembles *V. lanceolata*, but with small white flowers.

Damp soils of sand or peat, even gravel, especially on lakeshores.

Local, from Yarmouth and Kings to Halifax counties.

Limited to eastern North America, from NF to ON, south to MN and NY.

***Viola tricolor* L.**
Johnny-jump-up; violette tricolore



Photo by Andy Dean

Compact little plants, they may be simple or branched, bearing lanceolate or elliptic leaves, basally lobed. Plants are glabrous. Under cultivation, flowers are large, showy and variously bicoloured. Readily self-sowing, they produce leafy plants with smaller flowers in violet, yellow and white.

Occasional escape on roadsides, in fields or persisting in old gardens.



Photo by Martin Thomas

Scattered localities throughout the province.

Reported across Canada. European introduction.