



Master Gardeners of Ontario Facebook Group

Violets – Friend or Foe?

Many gardeners love violets in their garden and native violets are larval host plants for butterflies, so that makes them a friend. Violets in general can spread aggressively throughout the garden and non-native Sweet violet (*Viola odorata*) is now on the potentially invasive list, which makes them more of a foe.

Violets in the Lawn?

Native Violets will definitely spread in your lawn, but will also add biodiversity and support healthy ecosystems. Uniform manicured lawns are not beneficial for the environment as these monocultures destroy our watersheds and act as “food deserts” for native insects and birds.

Keep this in mind: "Violets move further from the category of ‘pest’ when butterfly gardeners realize that they are the prime caterpillar host plant for many of the Fritillary butterflies." Better Know a Host Plant <https://backyardbutterflies.org/better-know-a-host-plant-wild-violets/>

If you feel you need to manage these violets, start by mowing your lawn higher. In high cut lawns, (8 -9 cm) violets are less noticeable and may be better tolerated. Then make sure you follow good cultural practices to keep your lawn healthy.

- Healthy Lawns <https://www.canada.ca/.../protecting.../healthy-lawns.html>
- Violets in Lawns a Pro? or Con? <https://bygl.osu.edu/node/1239>

Hand pull small infestations. Violets are colony forming perennials that spreads by seed or short, stout rhizomes. Try to remove the entire rhizome and nip off flowers so they don't spread that way. Look for a round ball that is the seed pod and remove to reduce the seed bank in the soil.

Chemical Control

Chelated iron fertilizers or broadleaf herbicides can be used for spot treatments as a last resort.

Identification

There are over 30 violet species and variants in southern Ontario and they are very hard to differentiate. ID may require close examination of individual parts of the plant such as spurs, sepals, back of the flowers, styles and ovary. Even after many hours of checking, you may discover there are prevalent hybrids which defy identification.

- Viola ID with photos Minnesota Wildflowers <https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/search?kw=viola>

- GoBotany ID Key Viola <https://gobotany.nativeplanttrust.org/dkey/viola/>

The potentially invasive Sweet Violet (*Viola odorata*) can be identified by the following:

- flowers have a sweet scent,
- flowers are normally either dark violet or white,
- plant is [acaulescent](#)
- style is tipped by a sharp, conic recurved hook (and does not end with a rounded appendage)
- petioles usually have hairs which point downwards
- plant spreads with green cord-like stolons
- *Viola odorata*
<http://swbiodiversity.org/seinet/taxa/index.php?taxon=Viola%20odorata&fbclid=IwAR3OzKfaSWus7m9TwMDZ7FOnU-aNDNZVvy7l7r87kW1y6zEoElj52gBFmo>

Southern Ontario Violets

1. *Viola adunca* var. *adunca* Hooked spur Violet
2. *Viola affinis* Le Conte's Violet
3. *Viola arvensis* European Field Pansy
4. *Viola bicolor* Field Pansy
5. *Viola blanda* var. *blanda* Sweet White Violet
6. *Viola blanda* var. *palustriformis* Largeleaf Violet
7. *Viola canadensis* var. *canadensis* Canadian White Violet
<https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/flower/canadian-white-violet>
8. *Viola cucullata* Marsh Blue Violet
9. *Viola labradorica* Alpine Violet
10. *Viola lanceolata* ssp. *lanceolata* Bog White Violet
11. *Viola macloskeyi* ssp. *pallens* Smooth White Violet
12. *Viola nephrophylla* var. *nephrophylla* Northern Bog Violet
13. *Viola odorata* Sweet Violet
14. *Viola palmata* Early Blue Violet
15. *Viola pedata* Bird's-foot Violet <https://www.ontario.ca/page/birds-foot-violet>
16. *Viola pedatifida* Prairie Violet
17. *Viola pubescens* var. *pubescens* Downy Yellow Violet
18. *Viola pubescens* var. *scabriuscula* Smooth Yellow Violet
19. *Viola renifolia* Northern White Violet
20. *Viola rostrata* Long-spur Violet
21. *Viola rotundifolia* Roundleaf Violet
22. *Viola sagittata* var. *ovata* Ovate-leaved Violet
23. *Viola sagittata* var. *sagittata* Arrow-leaved Violet
24. *Viola selkirkii* Selkirk's Violet
25. *Viola sororia* Common Blue Violet <https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/flower/common-blue-violet>

26. *Viola striata* Striped Cream Violet
27. *Viola tricolor* Johnny Jump up
28. *Viola X brauniae* Braun's Hybrid Violet
29. *Viola X eclipses* Hybrid Violet
30. *Viola X malteana* Malte's Hybrid Violet
31. *Viola X populifolia* Poplar-leaved Hybrid Violet
32. *Viola X porteriana* Porter's Hybrid Violet
33. *Viola X sublanceolata*"

References

- Better Know a Host Plant <https://backyardbutterflies.org/better-know-a-host-plant-wild-violets/>
- *Viola odorata*
<http://swbiodiversity.org/seinet/taxa/index.php?taxon=Viola%20odorata&fbclid=IwAR3OzKfaSWus7m9TwMDZ7FOnU-aNDNZVvy7I7r87kW1y6zEoElj52gBFmo>
- GoBotany ID Key *Viola* <https://gobotany.nativeplanttrust.org/dkey/viola/>
- *Viola* ID with photos Minnesota Wildflowers
<https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/search?kw=viola>
- Identifying Violets <http://ontariowildflowers.com/groups/54/violetid.php>
- Key for Violet Species (colour)
<https://www.labunix.uqam.ca/~fg/MyFlora/Violaceae/Identification/identification.html>
- Michigan Herbarium Dichotomous Key for Violets
<https://michiganflora.net/genus.aspx?id=Viola>
- Healthy Lawns
<https://www.canada.ca/.../protecting.../healthy-lawns.html>
- Violets in Lawns a Pro? or Con? <https://bygl.osu.edu/node/1239>
- Violets of the Ottawa District <https://ofnc.ca/programs/fletcher-wildlife-garden/flora-and-fauna-at-the-fwg/violets-of-the-ottawa-district>
- Southern Ontario Vascular Species List
file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/SoOnPIList_SciName.pdf