

Folsom Native Plant Society

folsomnps.org

March 2011



From the President's Corner

Hi Everyone, March is marching right on through into April. I stepped outside to find my blooming violets and after a sneezing fit I located 3 kinds. White, purple, and light purple. (Could be a cross) Everyone bring your violets for a show and tell at our March meeting. The cedar waxwings have finally come to eat all remaining berries in the yard. Sassafras is in bloom along with sinus clogging pines and oaks.

Itchy eyes, vetch everywhere, clogged sinuses, and massive red ant hills. Springtime in Louisiana is here. Enjoy the wild flowers. AJ

Did you ever wonder, if you put all 50 state flowers together in a bouquet, what it would look like? Click [State Flowers](#) to see. This is an animated show called "America the Beautiful" by Jacquie Lawson. It shows each of the states' flower then places them in a bouquet!!!

IDENTIFYING LOUISIANA VIOLETS

The study of violets is no place for a shrinking violet. Ms. Dormon notes:

"Few persons seem to have any conception of how many species of wild violet there are."¹ Mr. Brown says: "Violets are difficult to identify."² Another authority states: "Few systematic botanists are authorities on violets, and many prefer to avoid them."

These little flowers cause big trouble because of the high degree of variability they exhibit. Plants of the same species may not look alike. Further complications arise from frequent hybridization between species, producing an even greater variety of forms.

Violets belong to Violacea, a family of

predominantly herbs, but which, in the tropics, can grow as shrubs and even trees. Every authority cites a different figure, of course, but Mabberley states the family Violacea has 20 genera with about 800 species worldwide. The genus *Viola* has about 400 species, and is the only genus exclusive to temperate climates, reaching peak diversity in North America and the Andes. Another principal genus is *Hybanthus*, with about 150 mostly tropical species.⁴

The violets we know, i.e. the lovely five-petaled purple flower probably blooming in your yard right now, are all in the genus *Viola*. Yes, but *Viola* what? There's the rub,

Looking at the sources frequently used by FNPS members, i.e. Dormon, Browne, and Timme, one sees different species

Next Meeting Date: Sunday, March 27, 2011 at 1:00 p.m.

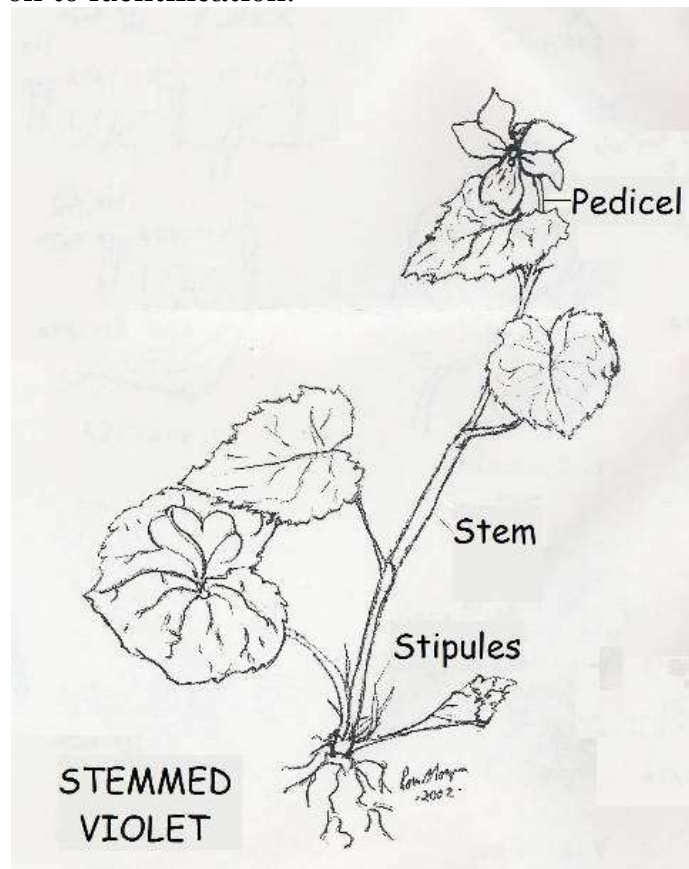
The [Lee Road Branch Public Library](#) 79213 Hwy 40, Covington, LA 70435 (985) 893-6284

From the south, you take Hwy. 190 north into Covington. At second red light past overpass turn right on Hwy 437 (Lee Road). Go 8 miles to an all-way stop at Hwy 40 and Lee Road. Proceed through stop. Lee Road Branch Library is the first building on the left after passing Lee Road Junior High School

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emphasized, and sometimes the same species referred to by differing scientific names. This latter condition is a question of synonyms, scientific names that have been used previously to refer to that plant, but for taxonomic or nomenclatural reasons are no longer preferred. For example, *Viola floridana* is no longer considered a separate species from *Viola sororia*, thus *V. sororia* is the accepted scientific name and *V. floridana* a synonym.

The following list compiles the species of *Viola* listed by Brown, Dormon, and Timme as native to Louisiana and Mississippi (and, for good measure, those listed in Dr. Norman Russell's more academic review⁵), and draws on various sources to provide tips for further identification. Accounting for synonyms, the final tally is 16 species of *Viola* you might hope to see, 15 natives plus one introduced exotic.⁶ Now that we know what to look for, on to identification.



Mrs. Doretta Kiaher published a wonderful book on violets (at age 86!) in which she noted three preliminary characteristics that aid in identifying violets: 1.) flower color;

2.) stemless or stemmed: the stemless violets have no stem above the ground, but have a short thick rootstock on which the flower stalk is borne; stemmed violets have stems from which the leaves and flowers branch; and 3.) leaf form: is the leaf uncut, with the typical heart shaped leaf, or cut, meaning divided into lobes of varying depth and number. Using this key, one can first identify the larger grouping in which to place the candidate violet, and then attempt a more specific definition.

Remember, however, that nothing is certain in the world of violets. Further study may well revise this list; species may be added or deleted. As the great Linnaeus himself asked: "Who errs not while perambulating the domain of nature? Who can observe everything with accuracy?" So pay some extra attention to violets this spring-and who knows-maybe you will discover *Viola folsomnativeplantsocietyensis!*

1. Purple Stemless Uncut:

Viola sororia - "Common Blue Violet" "Hooded Violet" "Sister Violet"

Name: from Latin *soror*'sister,' so called because early botanists saw it as the "sister" to familiar European species.

Further identification: A rather open sinus, i.e. the cleft or recess between two lobes, usually characterizes the leaves. The leaves vary in size and pubescence, i.e. hairiness, to the extent that what was once considered a separate species, *V. papilionacea*, proved to be a smooth leaved form of *V. sororia*. A variety with whitish petals with violet markings is known as Confederate Violet.

Notes: The most common species in the United States, and the one most likely growing on your lawn.

Synonyms: *V. floridana* (Timme)

Viola affinis LeConte - "Sand Violet" "Affiliated Violet" "Bayou Violet"

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Name: from Latin *affinis* 'neighboring; related by marriage,' perhaps because it is related to species and varieties, indeed so intimately related that many formerly separate species are now classified as varieties of *V. affinis*. John Eaton LeConte (1784-1860) was a pioneering botanist of the northeastern American flora.

Further identification: The leaves are rather small and triangular in appearance, with the sinus usually v-shaped. Our Gulf Coast variety, sometimes referred to as *V. langloisii*, usually has a deeper purple flower and longer peduncles, i.e. flower-stalks, than other varieties. Look for it in moist hardwood areas.

Notes: *V. affinis* is very common, but is easily mistaken for *V. sororia* or *V. cucullata*. *V. rosacea*, listed in Brown, is no longer considered a separate species, but a rosy-purpled flower variety of *V. affinis*.

Synonyms: *V. langloisii* (Brown, Dormon) *V. rosacea* (Brown, Dormon)

Viola cucullata - "Blue Marsh Violet"

Name: from Latin *cucullus* 'hood, cowl,' perhaps because of the leaf curl?

Further identification: Look very closely at the beards on the lower side petals. In *V. cucullata*, the hairs are thick and rounded at the tip, like tiny clubs. The flowers are carried well above the leaves, not equaling them in height as in *V. sororia*, have narrower petals, and are fewer in number. Leaves are generally smooth, but may be slightly pubescent, and the sinus is usually narrower than in *V. sororia*. The leaves have a tendency to curl in upon themselves as they age. *V. cucullata* grows from 5 to 10 inches high.

Notes: Look for it on the banks of streams, wet meadows, bogs. This is a violet of wet places.

Viola sagittata - "Arrow Leaved Violet"

Name: from Latin *sagitta* —'arrow.'

Further identification: Grows very tall with narrow elongate leaves (1.5 to 4 inches long) on long petioles. The base of the leaf typically

has a lobe or a spur. The flowers are borne on long, slender stems, 5 or 6 inches above the leaves.

Notes: Grows in moist woods. *V. sagittata* is particularly prone to hybridization.

Viola lovelliana - "Loveli's Violet" "Dogtooth Violet"

Name: Named for Mrs. Phoebe Lovell. She collected a specimen in March 1906 at Crowley, Louisiana, and sent the then unknown species to Ezra Brainerd, an eminent violet authority of the early 20th century (indeed, he named his daughter Viola).

Further identification: The leaves are similar to *V. sagittata*, but the flowers are larger and grow on long, slender pedicels, i.e. flower stalks, and are held high above the leaves. The winter leaves are small and cordate (heart-shaped). As the leaves age, their lobing increases, and they gradually assume a reddish-brown autumn coloring

Notes: Some authorities regard *V. lovelliana* as a variety of *V. pumila*.

Viola villosa - "Southern Woolly Violet" "Downy Violet" "Carolina Violet"

Name: from Latin *villosus* —'hairy.'

Further identification: the leaves are soft and woolly, covered with rusty hairs on the leaves and petioles, more lightly on the pedicels. *V. villosa* grows low, leafing, and spreading.

Notes: The earliest violet to bloom in Louisiana.

¹Caroline Dormon, *Wild Flowers of Louisiana and How to Know Them*.

²Clair Brown, *Wild Flowers of Louisiana*.

³Greene/Bloomquist, *Flowers of the South*. UNC Press, 1953.

⁴D.J. Mabberley, *The Plant Book*, Cambridge U. Press, 1997. *Hybanthus concolor* is listed in Timme.

⁵Dr. Norman Russell, "Keys to Louisiana Violets", *Southwestern Naturalist* 6:184-186.

⁶The authority used as the final word on species was the Integrated Taxonomic Information System, on the internet at www.itis.gov/

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is part one of a reprint from the FNPS newsletter of March 2002. Martin Morgan is the author and Pam Morgan, his wife did the illustrations. The remainder continues in the next newsletter. Thanks for their consent to reprint it here.