

# RI Violets

Stars will blossom in the darkness, Violets bloom beneath the snow.

— Julia C.R. Dorr

## Rhode Island Violets

by Francis Underwood

Violets are either acaulescent (having no stem) with leaves and peduncles arising from the rhizomes or caulescent (having a stem) bearing flowers and leaves on the same stem. There are three species of violets with leafy stems native to RI; *Viola canadensis* var. *canadensis*, *Viola labradorica* and *Viola pubescens*. All other native violets in RI are stemless.

Violets produce two kind of flowers; cleistogamous (having flowers without petals which do not open) and chasmogamous (having flowers with petals). Chasmogamous flowers bloom in the spring and cleistogamous flowers in the summer.

Hybrids among violets are very common. This can make identification problematic.

There are 15 species of violets native to RI. There are also several species of violets that are not native, but have naturalized. This article deals only with native violets.



**Viola blanda,**  
*Sweet White Violet,*  
often has flowers borne on red stems.  
It can be found in rich woods. Uncommon.

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Photo credit:© JL Reveal, L.H. Bailey Hortorium, Cornell University.

**Viola canadensis var. canadensis,**  
*Canadian White Violet,*  
is found in rich woods. State Historical (1920).



**Viola cucullata,**  
*Blue Marsh Violet,*  
is common in wet areas. It also occurs as a  
white-flowered form as seen here on the right  
in North Smithfield, RI. Common.

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**Viola labradorica (V. conspersa),**  
*American Dog Violet,*  
usually has light blue flowers, however white-flowered forms do  
occur. This white-flowered form (*V. conspersa forma masonii*)  
at right, was found in Charlestown, RI. Dog Violet grows in  
rich moist woods. Common.



Photo credit for photo on left: © Scott A. Milburn, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point  
Photo credit for photo on right: Jeff McMillian @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database

**Viola lanceolata,**  
*Lanced-leaved Violet.*  
is often found in wet habitats. It has white flowers. Common.



**Viola macloskeyi ssp pallens,**  
*Northern White Violet,*  
grows in wet, swampy areas. Common.



Photo credit: William R. Hewlett © California Academy of Sciences  
Original source of *Viola nephrophylla* image: [http://calphotos.berkeley.edu/cgi/img\\_query?query\\_src=photos\\_index&enlarge=8266+3261+1073+0007](http://calphotos.berkeley.edu/cgi/img_query?query_src=photos_index&enlarge=8266+3261+1073+0007)

***Viola nephrophylla*,**  
*Northern Bog Violet,*  
grows in rich wet areas. It has blue flowers. Rare.

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***Viola palmata* var *palmata*,**  
*Palmate-leaved Violet or Blue Wood Violet,*  
is rare in RI. It grows in rich woods. Haines in Botanical Notes #8,  
May 23, 2002\* says “*V. palmata* is a heterophyllous species (the  
early and late season leaves unlobed, the mid-season leaves lobed)”.\*  
(See *Viola subsinuata* below). State-threatened.



**Viola pedata,**  
*Birdfoot Violet,*  
grows in dry, sandy areas. Common.

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Photo credit: © Tom Barnes, University of Kentucky

**Viola primulifolia,**  
*Primrose-leaved Violet,*  
blooms white and grows in moist areas. Rare.



***Viola pubescens* var. *pubescens*,**  
*Yellow Forest Violet*  
is rare in RI. It can be found in rich woods.  
State Concern.



***Viola rotundifolia*,**  
*Stemless Yellow Violet or Yellow Round-leaved Violet,*  
is very rare in RI. It grows in rich, moist woods.  
State-threatened. This photo was taken from a population  
in Kent County on April 20, 2004.



Photo credit for photo on left: kbarton

**Viola sagittaria var ovata,**  
*Northern Downy Violet or Ovate-leaved Violet,*  
grows in dry, open areas. Common. The photo on the right  
was taken on ledge in Cumberland, RI on May 27, 2005.



**Viola sororia,**  
*Common Blue Violet,*  
is found in woods and fields and is the RI state flower. Common.





**Viola subsinuata,**  
*Early Blue Violet,*

is rare in RI. It grows in rich woods. Haines says  
“V. subsinuata is a homophyllous plant with all  
leaves lobed into 5-16, often narrow, segments”  
(Botanical Notes #8, May 23, 2002\*). State Endangered.

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\* Web address for Botanical Notes #8, May 23, 2002 :  
[http://www.arthurhaines.com/botanical\\_notes/BotNotes\\_N8.pdf](http://www.arthurhaines.com/botanical_notes/BotNotes_N8.pdf)

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