

Common blue violet

(*Viola sororia*)

For definitions of botanical terms, visit en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_botanical_terms.

Dainty, ground-hugging, perennial and edible are just a few descriptions for Florida's common blue violet. This plant is aptly named as it is the violet that is most common throughout Florida and is often seen in cultivated lawns. It occurs naturally in hammocks and uplands hardwood forests. Violets grow in clumps, forming a thick groundcover that will never need to be mowed. They are prolific self-seeders, as well. When grown in the right conditions, violets flower from spring through the summer months.

This lovely little native is easily identified by its dark-green, heart-shaped leaves that are hairy and petiolate with toothed margins. Its solitary, two-lipped flowers have five petals; the lower petals are spurred. Flowers may be blue, violet or lilac. They have five sepals. Stems arise from a basal rosette of leaves. They are erect but have a slight nod. Fruits are inconspicuous capsules.

Violets are eaten by fritillary caterpillars, rabbits, deer, wild turkeys, and other small mammals and birds. For humans, violet leaves are quite healthy when eaten in moderation. They can be eaten raw, dried (as a tea), or cooked like spinach. The edible flower adds color to any salad and can also be candied. Both leaves and flowers have a slightly nutty, somewhat bland taste, but they are high in vitamins A and C. (Caution: Eating violet leaves in excess can cause nausea and vomiting.)

Family: Violaceae (Violet family)

Native range: Nearly throughout Florida

To see where natural populations of Common blue violet have been vouchered, visit www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu.

Hardiness: Zones 8–10

Soil: Moist, well-drained organic soils

Exposure: Full sun to partial shade

Growth habit: 3–6" tall and about as wide

Propagation: Seed, division of rhizomes

Garden tips: Common blue violet will grow well in shade, but it will not flower. It is very easy to cultivate and will self-seed freely and can spread rapidly in the right conditions.

Common blue violet plants are sometimes available from nurseries that specialize in Florida native plants. Visit PlantRealFlorida.org to find a nursery in your area.



Photo by Katherine Edison