

Native Violets of Louisiana

By Kathleen Harrington



Viola spp. — Herb of the Year, 2022



Viola tricolor
Heart's ease, Johnny jump-up



Viola × *wittrockiana*
garden pansy

What are Violas?

- Genus of violets
 - 500 – 600 species, mostly in cooler climates
 - More than 300 native to the US — but not pansies and Johnny-jump-ups!
 - 14 species recorded in Louisiana
- Annual, biennial, or short-lived perennial, depending on location
- Species hybridize freely making identification challenging

Violas in General

- Some of the first flowers to appear in early spring
- Excellent ground cover plant for shady or part sunny areas
- Flowers can be blue, purple, yellow, or white
 - Four unlike petals arranged in pairs and a fifth lower-lobed petal with a spur

Uses and Benefits of Wild Violas

- Culinary
 - Leaves and flowers are edible
 - Rich in vitamins A and C
 - Use leaves in salads or cooked as greens
 - Flowers can be used as garnishes or candied
- Larval host for fritillary butterflies
- Early nectar and pollen source for pollinators

Native Violets of Louisiana

- *Viola affinis* — sand violet
- *V. bicolor* — common field pansy
- *V. lanceolata* — lance-leaf violet
- *V. pedata* — bird-foot violet
- *V. pubescens* — downy yellow violet
- *V. sagittata* — arrow-leaf violet
- *V. sororia* — common blue violet
- *V. walteri* — prostrate blue violet

Viola affinis

Sand Violet

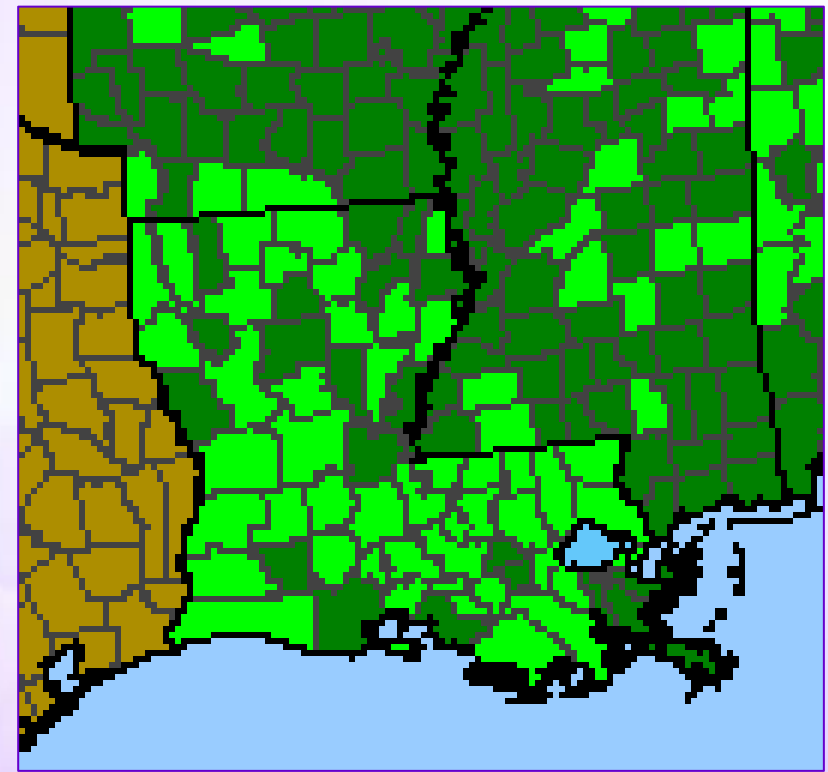
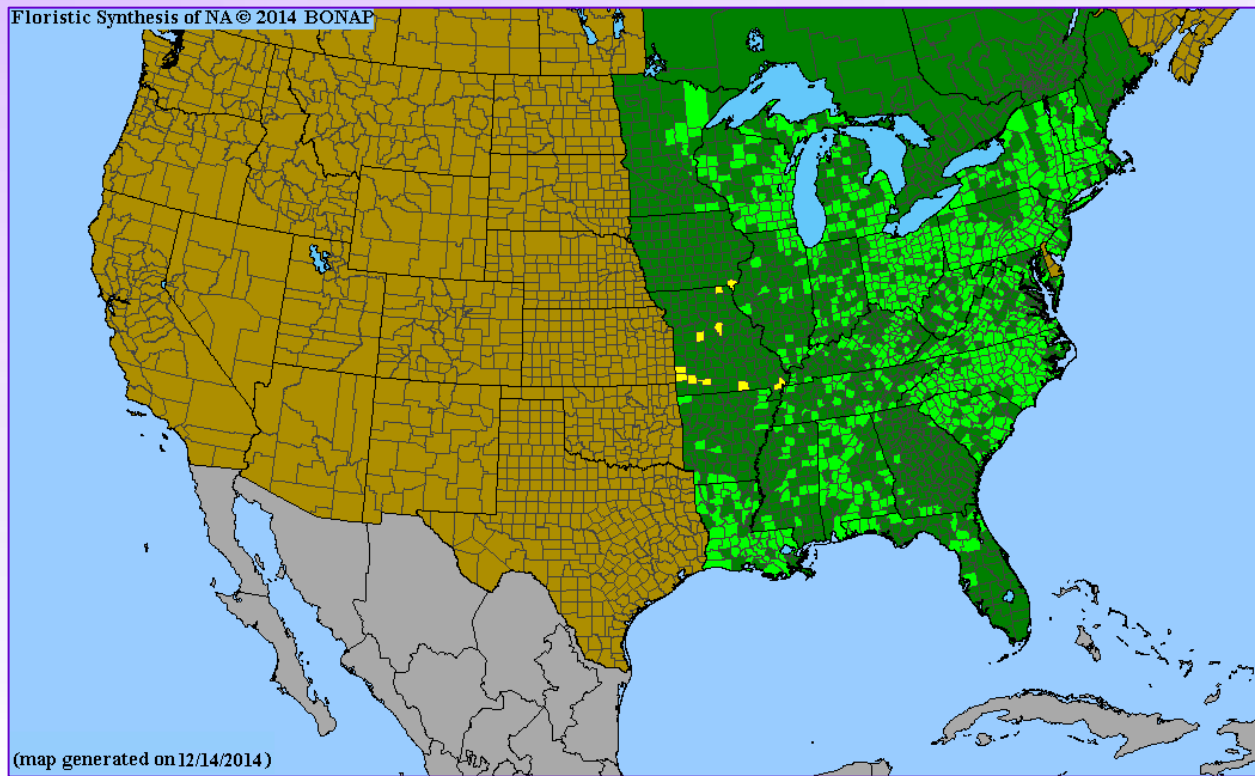


V. affinis — Appearance



- Blue to violet flower with conspicuous white throats
- Three lower petals somewhat hairy
- Heart-shaped leaves, coarsely **toothed**
- **Plant** ranges from 6 – 10 in. tall
- Very similar to *V. sororis*

V. affinis — Range



V. affinis — General Characteristics

- **Wetland Class**
 - FACW (Usually occurs in wetlands but occasionally found in non-wetlands)
- **Habitat**
 - Moist meadows, low woods, shady stream banks
- **Bloom:** May – July
- **Duration:** Annual, Perennial
- **Rarity:** Not rare
- **In the Garden**
 - Can be used in a shade garden or as groundcover under trees

V. affinis — More Views



Viola bicolor

Common Field Pansy

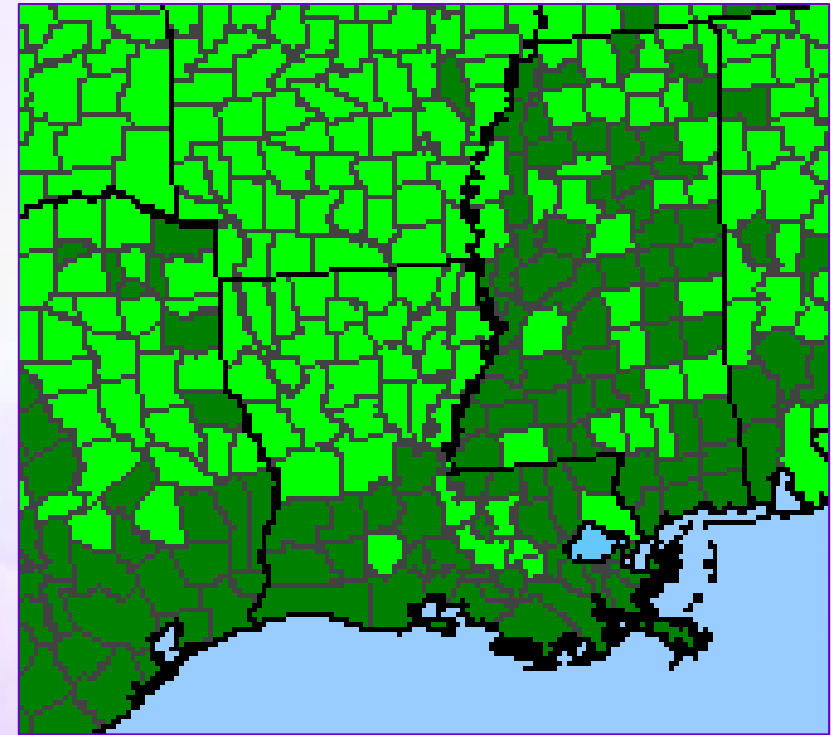
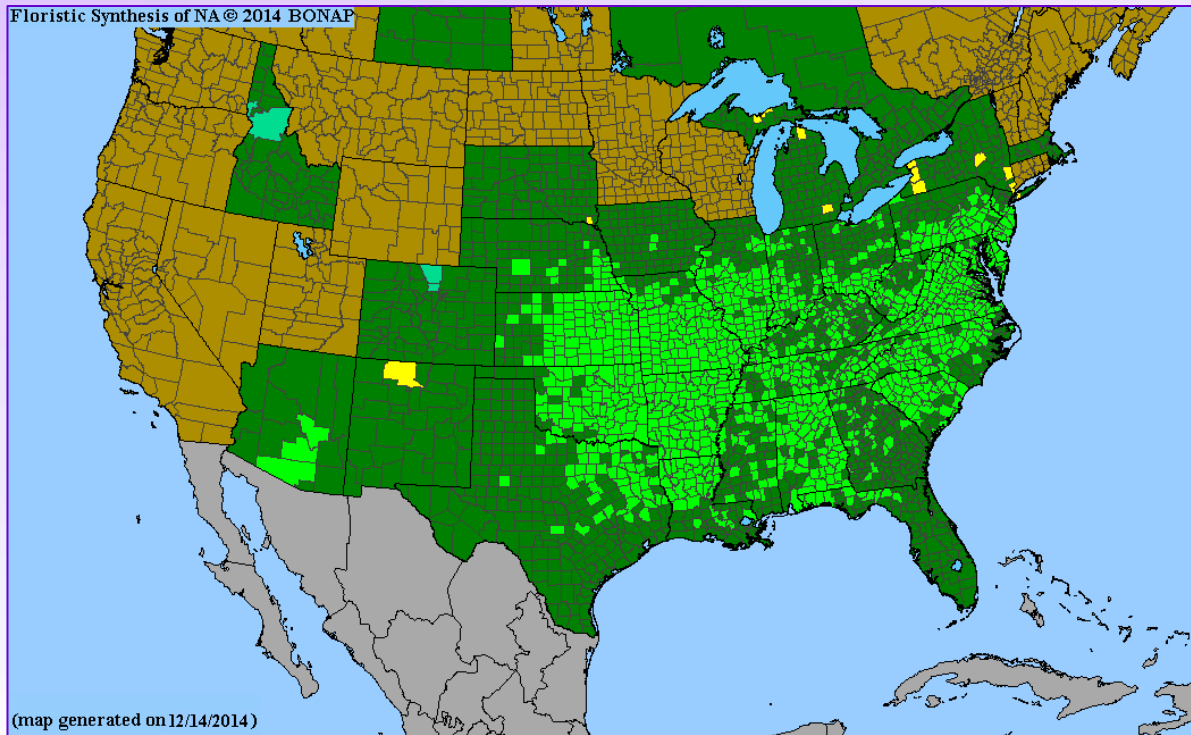


V. bicolor— Appearance



- Deep violet to pale lavender
 - Petals violet-blue to light lavender-blue or whitish
 - Lower ones darkly veined toward base
 - Lowest one more-or-less yellow toward center and base

V. bicolor— Range



V. bicolor— General Characteristics

- **Wetland Class**
 - FACU (Usually occurs in non-wetlands but occasionally found in wetlands)
- **Habitat**
 - Open woods, pastures, roadsides, lawns and other disturbed habitats
- **Rarity:** Not rare in Louisiana
- **Bloom:** March and April
- **Duration:** Annual
- **In the Garden**
 - Average, moist, well-drained soils; full sun to part shade
 - Tolerates light foot-traffic; can be used as lawn alternative
 - Use with caution — can be invasive

V. bicolor — Historical Uses



- Important medicinal herb among Native Americans
 - Made teas and decoctions of viola leaves and flowers to treat headaches, colds, boils, sore throats and toothaches
 - Soaked corn seed before planting in a tea made from the roots as an insect repellent

V. bicolor — More Views



Viola lanceolata

Lance-leaf Violet

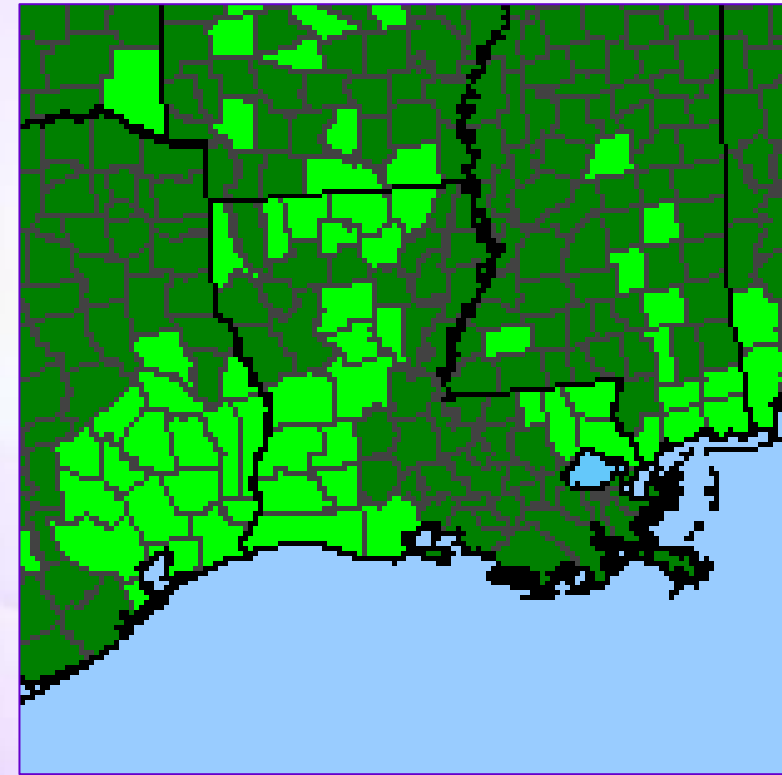
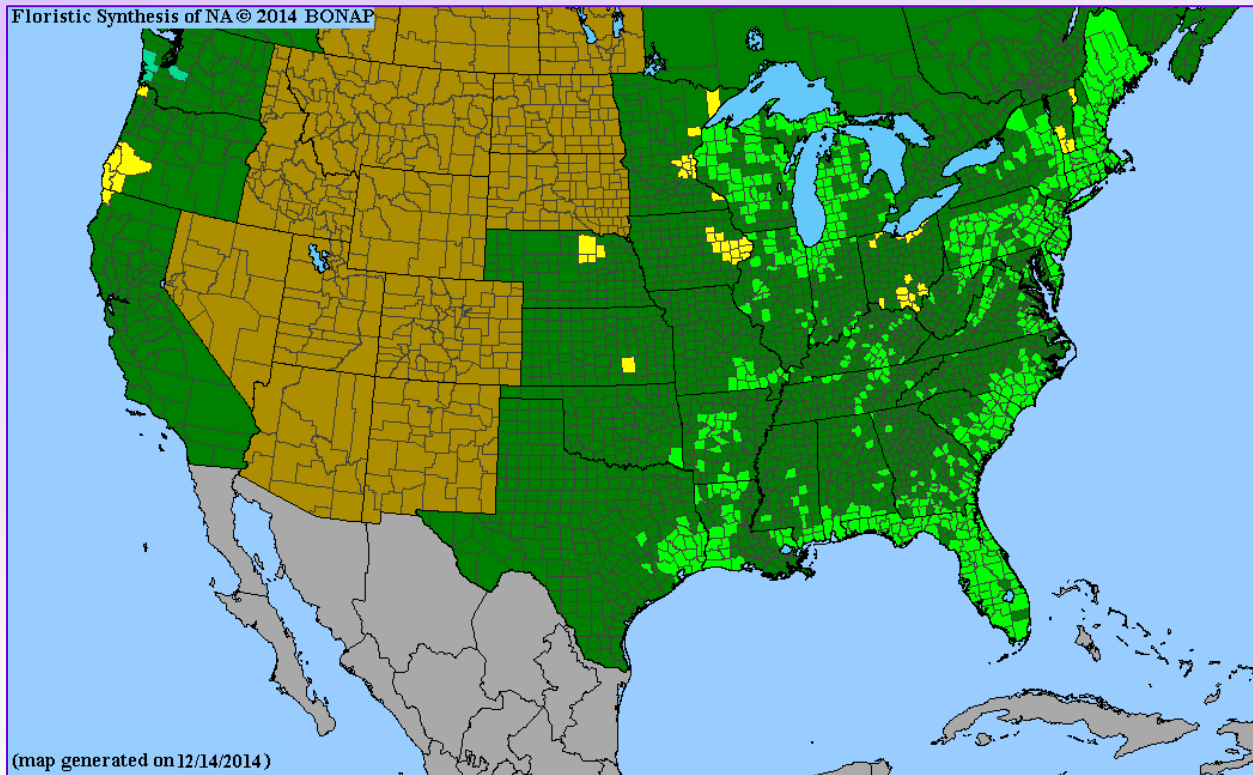


V. lanceolata — Appearance



- White
- Five irregular petals
 - Greenish-yellow at base
 - Numerous dark reddish to purple veins on lower petal
- Flower usually held above or among the leaves
- Spreads by runners

V. lanceolata — Range



V. lanceolata — General Characteristics

- **Wetland Class**
 - OBL (Almost always is a hydrophyte, rarely in uplands)
- **Habitat**
 - Widespread but needs consistently wet location
 - Coastal plains, bogs, swamps, wet meadows, prairies, roadside ditches, wet open fields, and sandy habitats
- **Bloom:** March – June
- **Duration:** Perennial
- **Rarity:** Not rare in Louisiana
- **In the Garden**
 - Use in bogs and water gardens; very high moisture needs
 - Full sun to partial shade

V. lanceolata — More Views



Viola pedata

Bird-foot Violet

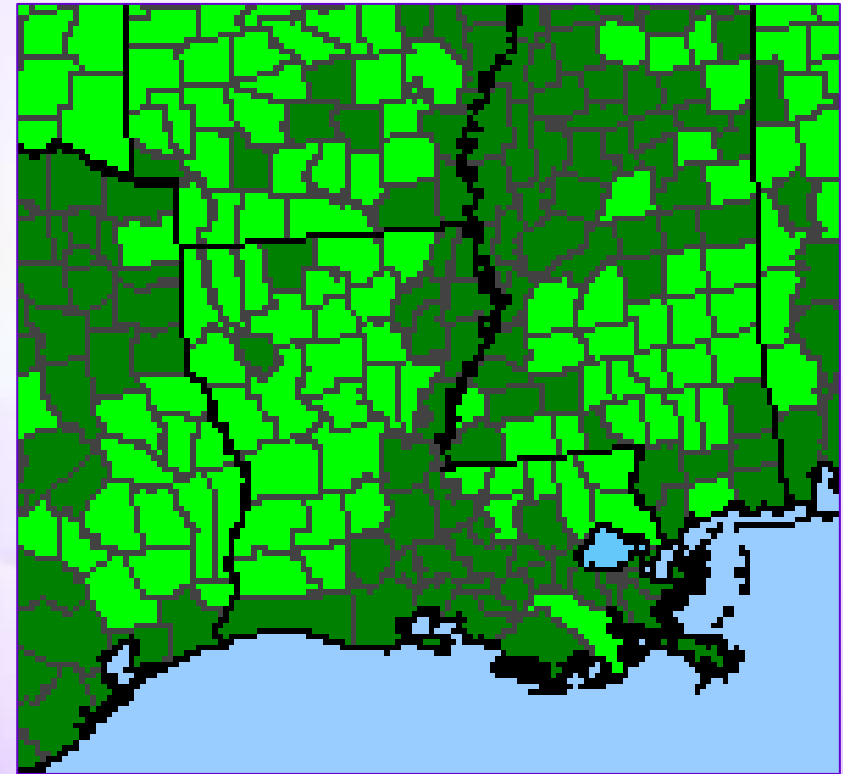
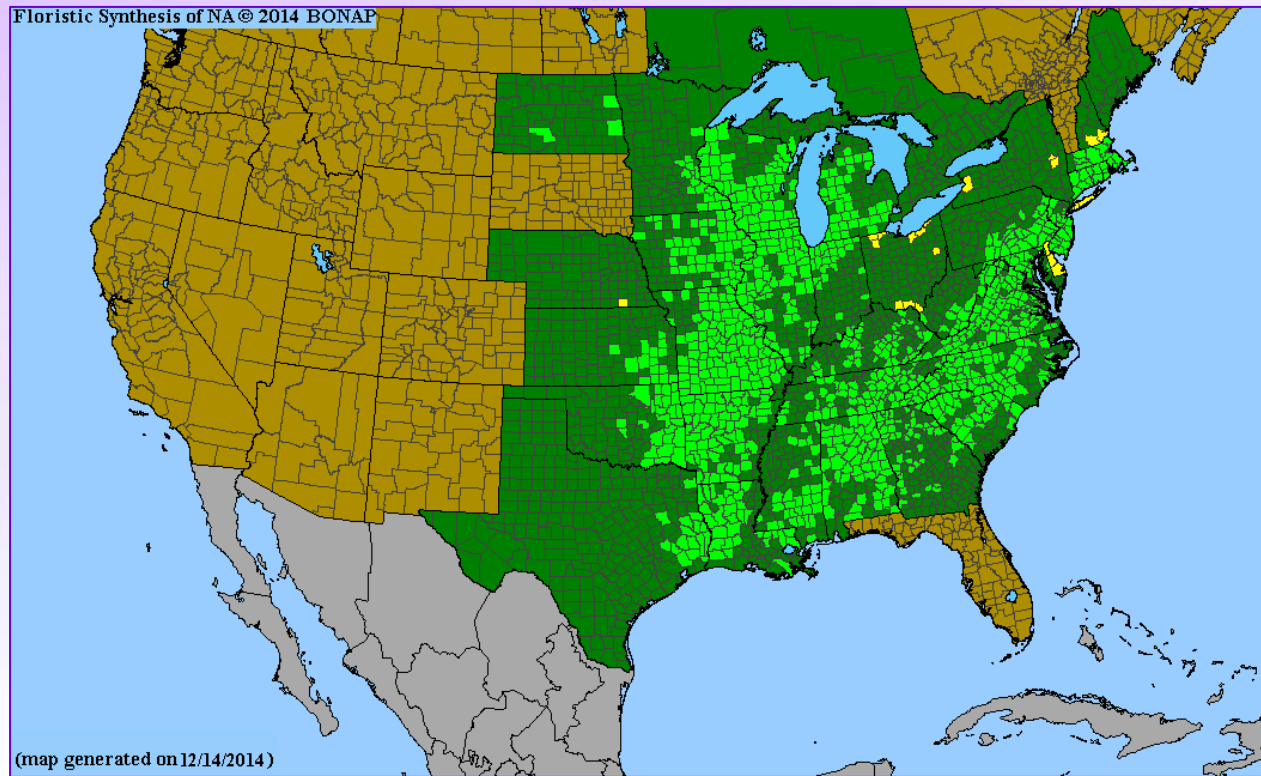


V. pedata — Appearance



- Lavender-blue or bicolored flowers with orange anthers
- Plant grows 4 – 8 in. high
- Deeply veined foliage looks like an outstretched bird's foot

V. pedata — Range



V. pedata — General Characteristics

- **Wetland Class**

- FACU (Occasionally is a hydrophyte, but usually occurs in uplands)

- **Habitat**

- Rocky, open woods, sandy prairies
- Widely distributed in pineland soils

- **Bloom**

- March – June; September – October

- **Duration:** Perennial

- **Rarity:** Not rare in Louisiana

- **In the Garden**

- Full sun to partial shade; water regularly but do not overwater

V. pedata — More Views



Viola pubescens

Downy Yellow Violet

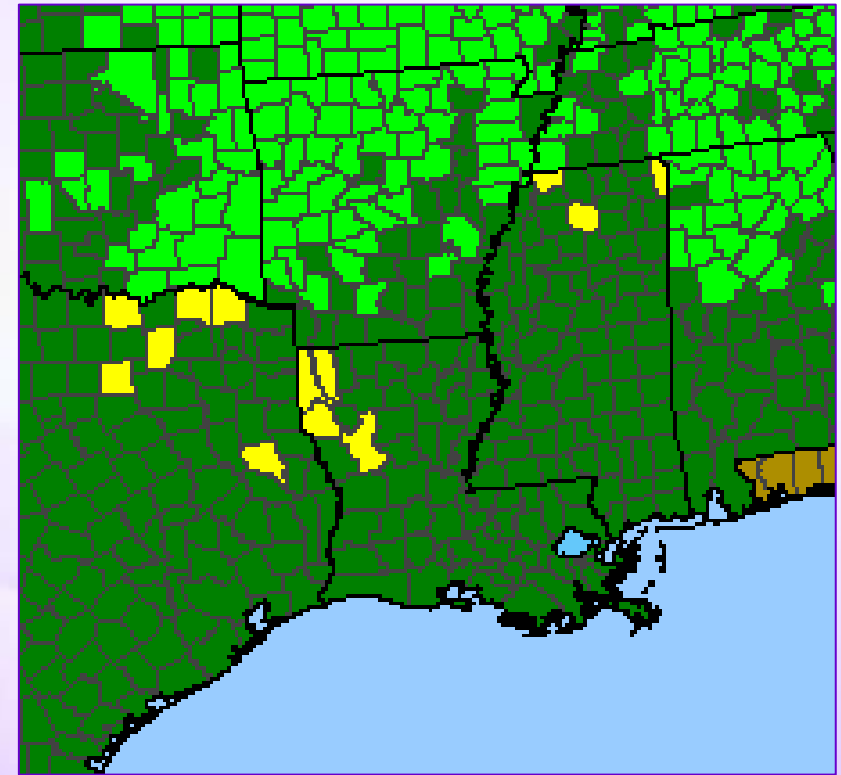
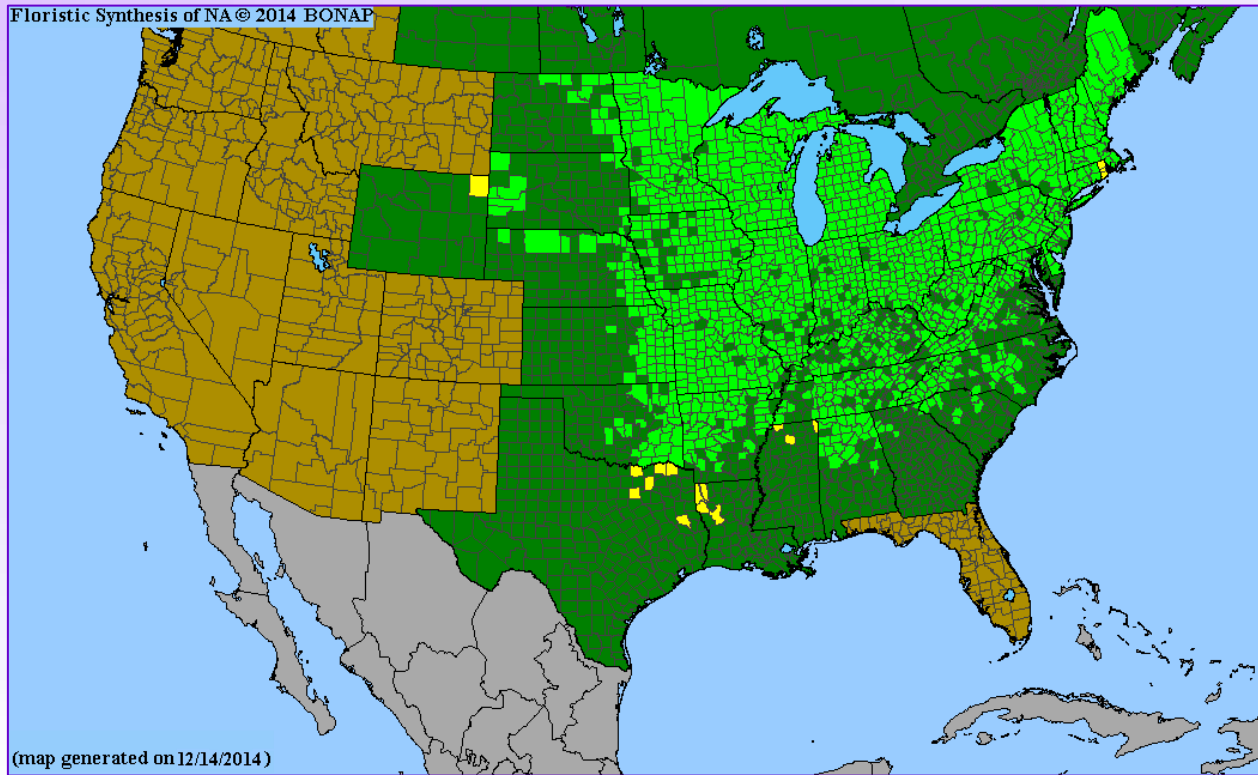


V. pubescens — Appearance



- Bright yellow flowers, veined with purple toward the throat
- Softly hairy foliage

V. pubescens Range



V. pubescens — General Characteristics

- **Wetland Class**
 - FACU (Occasionally is a hydrophyte, but usually occurs in uplands)
- **Habitat**
 - Rich, dry woods, alluvial woods, stream banks, thickets, and sometimes meadows
- **Bloom:** March – June
- **Duration:** Perennial
- **Rarity:** Rare in Louisiana
- **In the Garden**
 - Average water needs; sun to partial shade or light shade

V. pubescens — Other Views



Viola sagittata

Arrow-leaf Violet

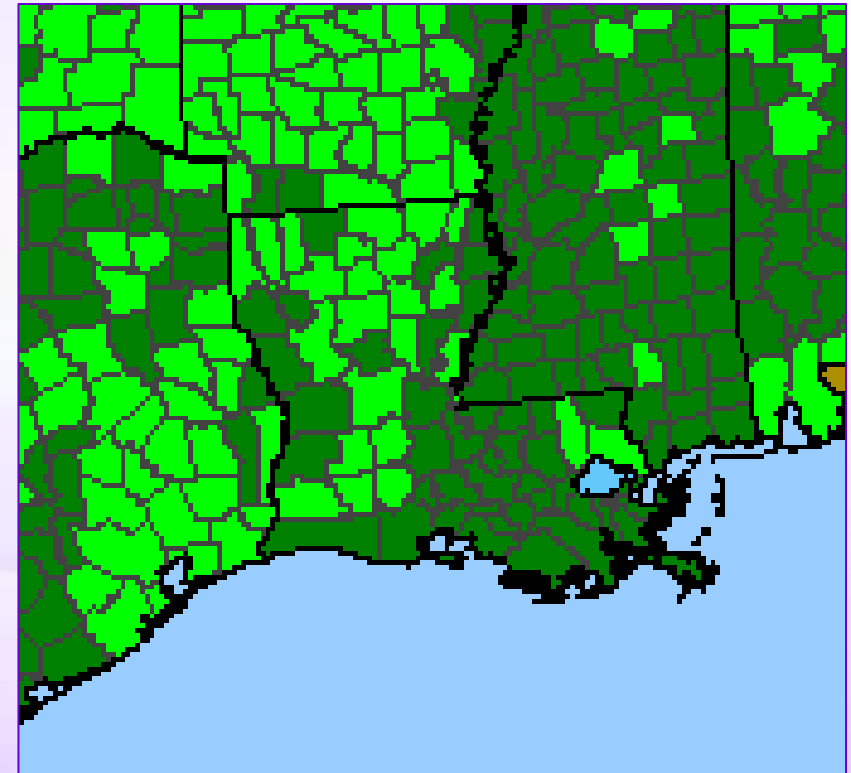
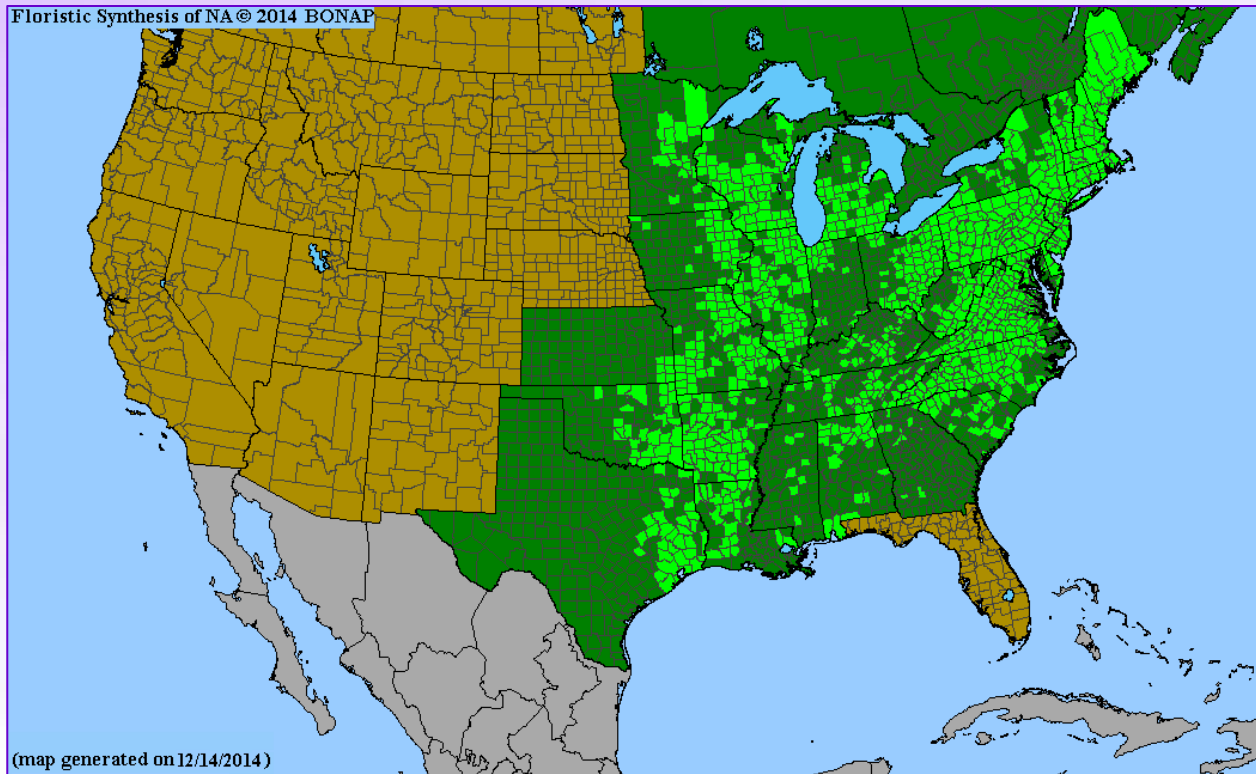


V. sagittata — Appearance



- Blue to purple flowers
- Patch of white with prominent purple-violet veins at the base of the lowermost petal
- Leaves have distinctive arrowhead shape

V. sagittata — Range



V. sagittata — General Characteristics

- **Wetland Class**
 - FACW (Usually is a hydrophyte but occasionally found in uplands)
- **Habitat**
 - Dry sandy woods, edges of woods, dry to moist open woods, clearings, meadow sand in prairie remnants of Louisiana and east Texas
- **Bloom:** March – June
- **Duration:** Perennial
- **Rarity:** Not rare in Louisiana
- **In the Garden**
 - Moderate sun but relatively shade-tolerant; protect from strong summer sun
 - Not drought-tolerant, but do not overwater

V. sagittata — Other Views



Viola sororia

Common Blue Violet

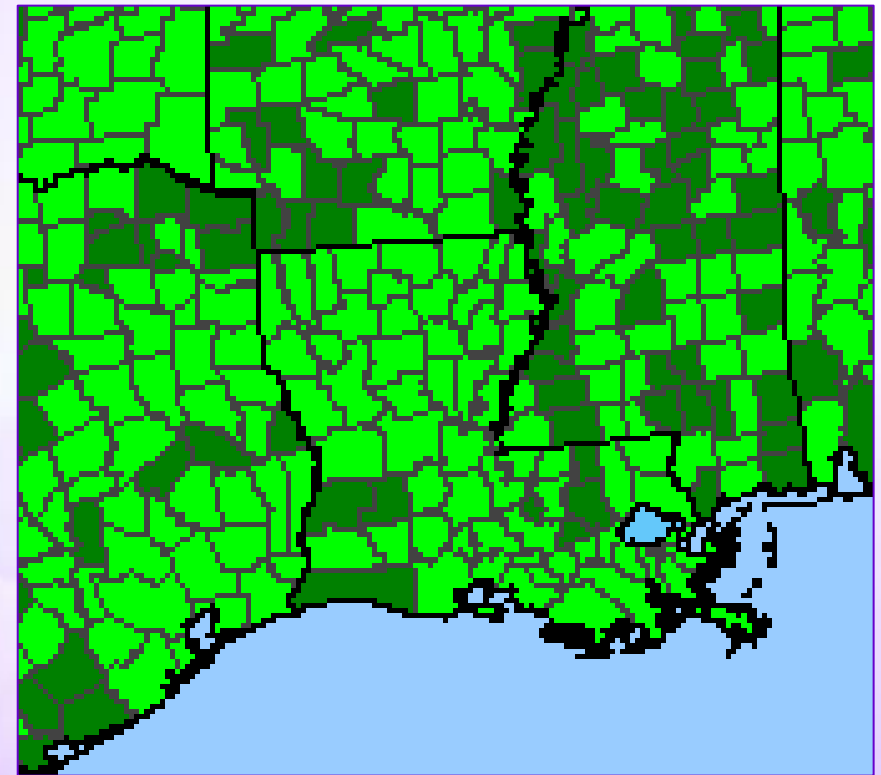
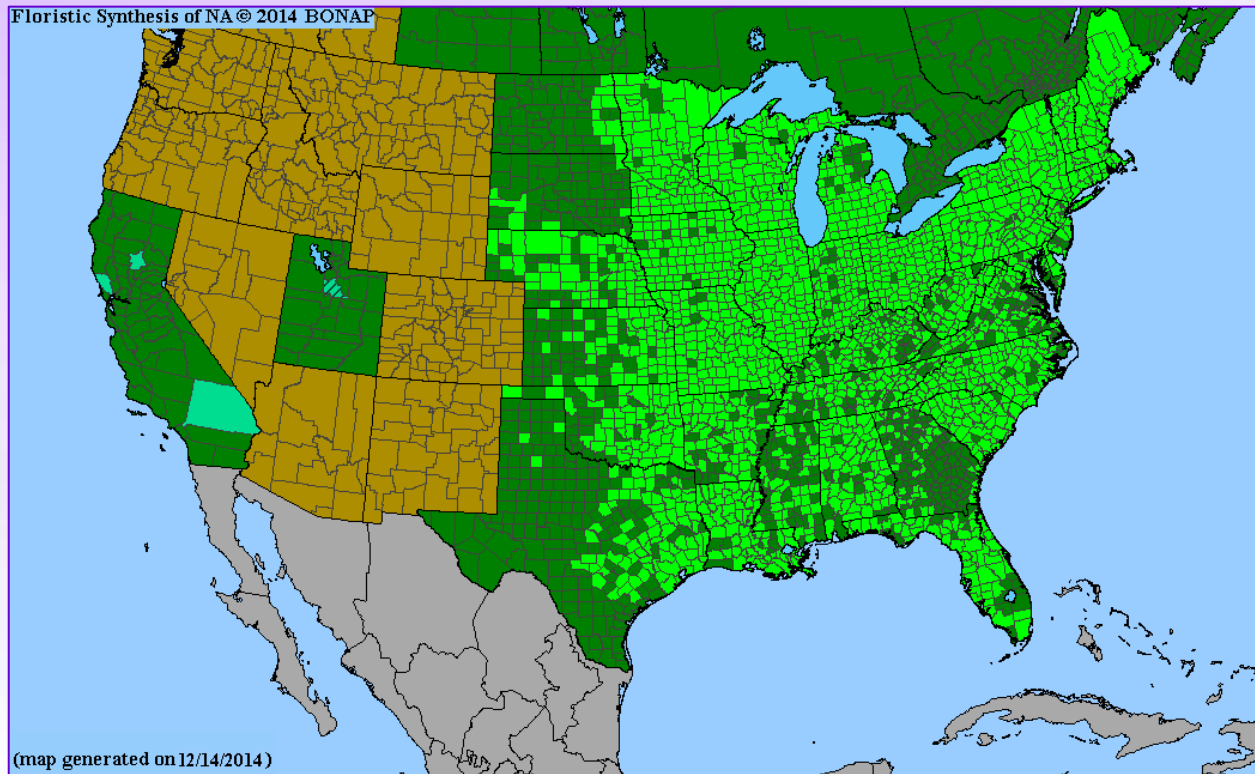


V. sororia — Appearance



- Purple flowers with conspicuous white throats
- Three lower petals somewhat hairy
- Leaves glossy, heart-shaped
- Plant grows 6 – 10 in. tall

V. sororia — Range



V. sororia — General Characteristics

- **Wetland Class**
 - FAC (Equally likely to occur in wetlands and nonwetlands)
- **Habitat**
 - Rich moist woods, swamps, stream valleys, woodland-prairie borders and prairie ravines
- **Bloom:** March – June
- **Duration:** Perennial
- **Rarity:** Not rare in Louisiana
- **In the Garden**
 - Sun to partial shade; water regularly but do not overwater
 - Can be invasive

V. sororia — Other Views



Viola walteri

Prostrate Blue Violet

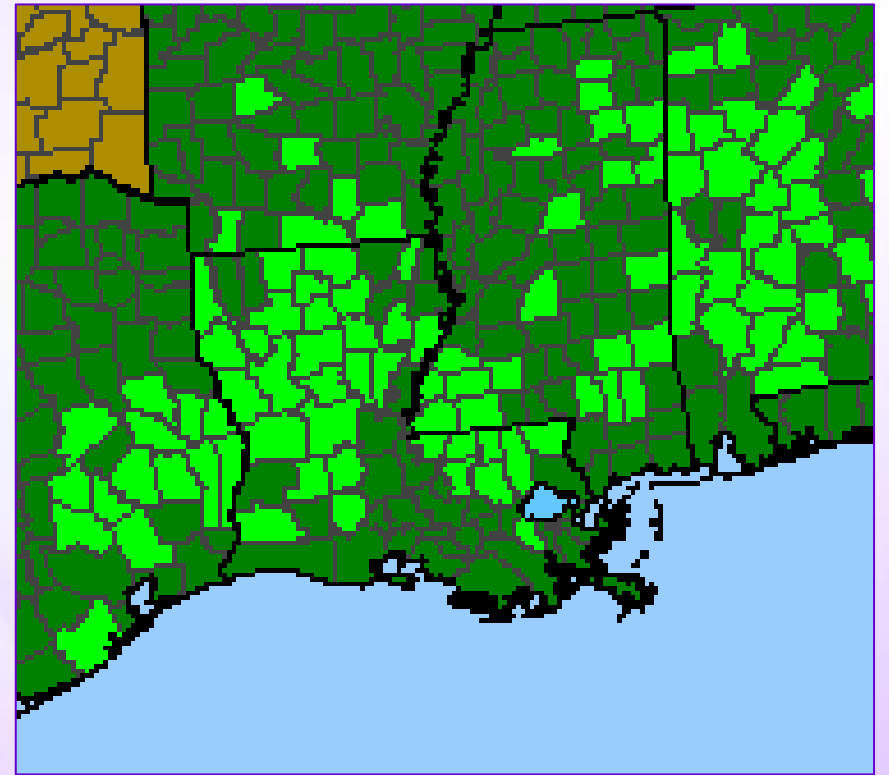
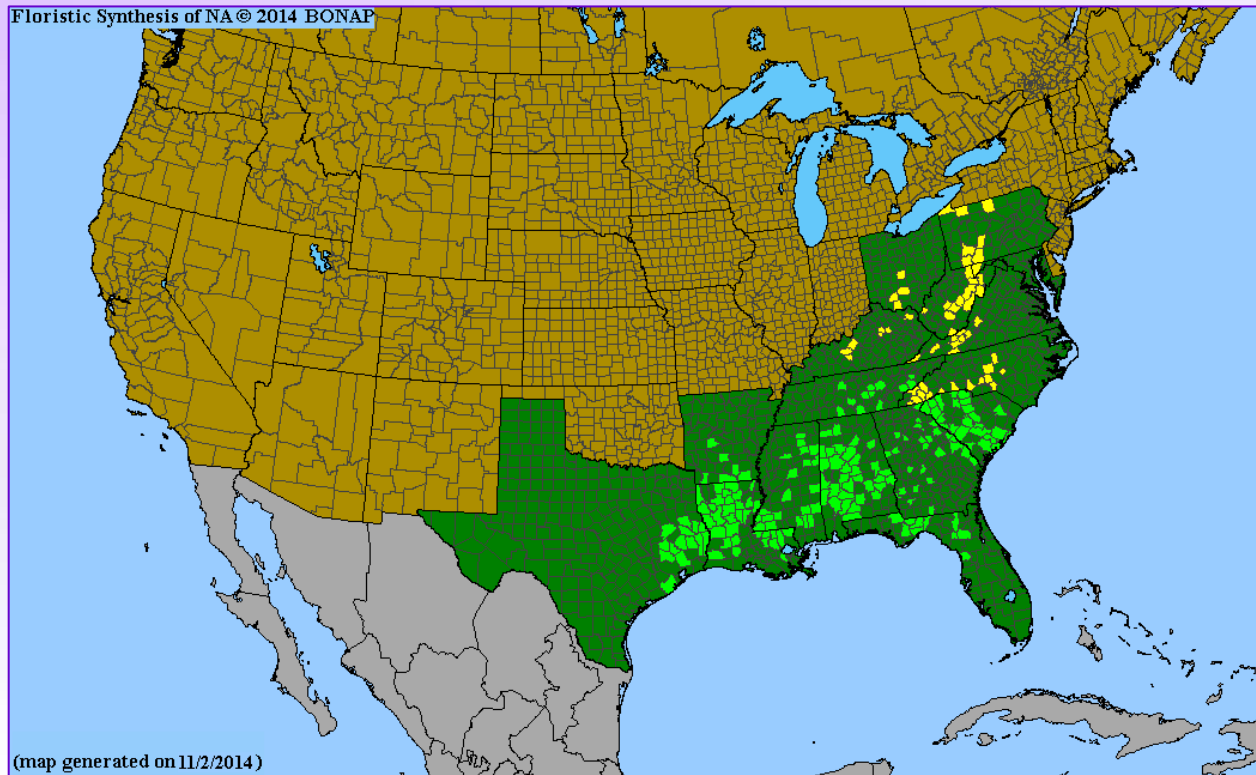


V. walteri— Appearance



- One of the earliest violas to bloom
- Solitary, showy purple flowers
- Trailing stems, rounded leaves
- Basal leaves partially evergreen; new growth in early spring

V. walteri— Range



V. walteri— General Characteristics

- **Wetland Class**
 - FACU (Usually occurs in non-wetlands but occasionally found in wetlands)
- **Habitat**
 - Moist, deciduous woods
 - Does not flourish in pinelands
- **Bloom:** February – May
- **Duration:** Perennial
- **Rarity:** Not rare in Louisiana
- **In the Garden**
 - Shade to partial shade; good for small shade gardens
 - Water regularly to encourage solid cover

V. walteri — Other Views



Propagating Native Violets

- **Division**

- Root or rhizome division, or just digging up random violet plants, is best done in the fall
- Only divide or transplant established plants when the plant is dormant or approaching dormancy
- Since this is an early spring blooming flower, it should not be dug up in spring, as all of the plant's energy is going into producing the flower
- Violets generally do not survive transplanting when blooming or making seeds

Propagating Native Violets (continued)

- **Seed**

- Within a week or two of the last flowering, check the plants regularly for ½" pale green seedpods
 - The pods point downward until the seeds begin to ripen, when they turn tan and papery, and reorient, pointing upwards
 - If the seeds have begun to turn brown, they are ripe and ready to collect; seeds explode outward when the pods split
- Seeds can be sown immediately in pots outdoors
- Can also be left to dry for a few weeks in a paper bag, then refrigerated in a sealed jar or bag for fall sowing

Sources

- [Native Violas and Violets of Louisiana](#)
- [USGS Plants of Louisiana](#)
- [USDA Plants Database](#)
- [Biota of North America Program Plant Atlas](#) (maps)
- [Wild Violet — Overview of Facts, Growing Conditions](#)
- [Dave's Garden Plant Files — Violas](#) (cultivation info)
- [Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center](#)
- [Illinois Woodland Wildflowers](#)
- [Online Plant Guide.com](#)
- [Wild Seed Project](#)

Sources (continued)

- [Gardenia — Creating Gardens](#)
- [North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox](#)
- [Maryland Biodiversity Project](#)
- [Native Plant Trust Go Botany](#)
- [National Wetland Plant List](#)
- [Wild Violets Care — How to Grow Wild Violet Plants](#)
- [Herb Society of America Blog](#)
- [International Herb Association](#)
- [PennState Extension](#)
- [TheSpruce: How to Grow and Care for Violas](#)