

VIOLETS (VIOLA) OF SASKATCHEWAN



1. *V. adunca*

2. *V. nephrophylla*

3. *V. Nuttallii*

4. *V. palustris*

6. *V. Rafinesquii*

5. *V. pedatifida*

7. *V. renifolia*

8. *V. rugulosa*

Breitung Sleep.

Violets of Saskatchewan

August J. Breitung
Botanist, C.E. Farm, Ottawa



Eight species of violets (*Viola*) occur in Saskatchewan (Plate 1). All have irregular 5-parted corollas, the lower petal spurred; stamens short and included, the anthers more or less coherent and two of them with an appendage projecting into the spur; capsule 3-valved, each boat-shaped and several seeded. After opening, each valve, as it dries, folds firmly together lengthwise, thus shooting the smooth, hard seeds in all directions, sometimes three feet distance. In addition,

other agencies have probably assisted in the distribution of violets such as rivers, wind animals, and birds.

Besides petaliferous flowers, some violet species produce also closed or cleistogamous flowers without petals, at or near the surface of the ground and are self-fertilizing in the bud.

Violets flourish in all parts of the province under a wide variation of environment from the dry windswept plains in the south to the rich moist forest region to the north; along streams, in bogs and on gravelly hills. A murmuring brook fringed by countless fragrant blue violets, each delicate flower glistening with dew drops in early morning, is a memory never forgotten.

1. *Viola adunca* J.E. Smith. HOOKED-SPUR VIOLET. Tufted plant with short stout rhizome; stems leafy, spreading to ascending, 2 to 6 in. long, densely puberulent to glabrous; lvs. cordate-ovate to round-ovate, narrowed toward the apex, .5 to 1.5 in. broad, entire to crenate; flrs. mauve to violet-blue, 3 lower petals white at base, veined with dark violet, spur hooked or straight (*Viola subvestita* Greene). Common in dry sandy open woods, rocky slopes and moist meadows on prairie. May - June.

2. *Viola nephrophylla* Greene. NORTHERN BOG VIOLET. Plant stemless; lvs. and peduncles arising from a short thick rhizome; blades cordate-ovate to reniform, 1 to 2 in. broad, often broader than long, glabrous, purplishtinged beneath, crenate; flrs. on peduncles 3 to 4 in. long, equalling or overtopping the leaves; petals deep bluish-violets, white at the base, bearded, spurred petal veined with darker violet. Common in shade along margins of cold streams, lakes and in bogs. May - June.

3. *Viola Nuttallii* Pursh. YELLOW PRAIRIE VIOLET. Plant tufted from a tapering rootstock; stems at first obscure, lengthening as the season advances; lvs. lanceolate to elliptic, wavy margined, ciliate, pubescent beneath, petioles slender, pubescent; flrs. yellow, back of the 2 upper petals purple, the 3 lower petals veined with dark brownish-purple. (*V. vallicola* A. Nels.; *V. Russellii* Boivin). Sandy semi-arid plains. May - June.

4. *Viola plustris* Linn. MARSH VIOLET. Plant stemless, glabrous; leaves and peduncles from a slender creeping rhizome, stolons forking, leafy-tipped; lvs. broadly cordate-ovate to reniform, thin glabrous, crenate, 1.5 to 3 cm. broad; flrs. fragrant, lilac-purple to nearly white, on peduncles overtopping the leaves, 3 lower petals veined with dark violet base of lateral petals bearded,

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spur short, less than 2 mm. long. Occasional along cool forest streams and swamps. June -- July.

5. *Viola pedatifida* G. Don. PURPLE PRAIRIE VIOLET. Plant stemless, minutely, pubescent to glabrate, from an erect rhizome; lvs. divided to the base into many segments; flrs. large, 12 to 15 mm. across, reddish-violet, usually overtopping the leaves, the 3 lower petals veined with darker violet and densely bearded at the base; sepals ciliate. Dry gravelly hills; plains. May.

6. *Viola Rafinesquii* Greene. FIELD PANSY. Slender leafy stemmed annual, simple or branch, 3 to 6 in. high; lvs, small, basal ones rounded, the cauline spatulate to obovate, slightly undulate; stipules leaf-like, deeply cut; flrs. bluish-white to cream, 7 to 10 mm. long, or twice as long as the sepals. (*V. Kitaibeliana* R. & S. var *Rafinesquit* (Greene) Fernald). In grain fields, introduced from Eurasia. May -- July.

7. *Viola renifolia* A. Gray. KIDNEY-LEAVED VIOLET. Plant stemless, glabrous or pubescent; rhizome, non-stoloniferous; lvs. to orbicular with open sinus, coarsely crenate, 1.5 to 5 cm. broad, lustrous beneath; flrs. white, on peduncles 3 to 3 in. long, petals beardless, the 3 lower veined with purple. (*V. Brainerdii* Greene). Frequent in cool, rich moist woods May -- June.

8. *Viola rugulosa* Greene. TALL STEMMED WHITE VIOLET. Stems 8 to 24 in. high, single or few from a slender rhizome, spreading rapidly by elongating, forking subterranean stolons; lvs. broadly cordate-ovate, short acute, slightly wrinkled, dentate, pubescent beneath, sinus deep, basal lvs. on long petioles, the blades sometimes 4 in. broad when fully developed; flrs. from axils of the upper leaves, petals 10 to 12 mm. long, white, yellow at the base, the 3 lower veined with dark violet, all suffused with reddish-violet on the back. (*V. Rydbergii* Greene). Woods especially abundant in the aspen grove section. May -- July.

Touchwood Hills --

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woods. By way of a winding earth road I made a side trip into the hills. Leaving my car on a hillcrest, I entered the cool green depths of the woods. Through underbush of Saskatoon-bush, past the fruiting season but still bearing some sweet purple berries, through tangled thickets of chokecherry, dogwood, willow, and pincherry, up steep banks where wild raspberry still held delicious juicy fruit, I followed a narrow winding deer trail that led me to a small slough where ducks rose in scattering flight from the water, and redwing blackbirds perched on swaying rushes.

Beyond the slough, the trail led out into the sunlight again. Across grassy meadows gay with flowers, Yarrow, Bluebell, Coneflower, and Bergamot. A country unspoiled, almost untouched by the hand of man; this is how it must have looked a hundred years ago.

Wide stretches of wheatland now cover the once grassy vastness of the Buffalo Plains, but here high in the

hills the scene is little changed. It needs only a cree hunter with bow, arrow, and knife stalking along the winding trail through the cool and shady places, or on the windswept upland meadows, a deerskin clad figure, mounted on a light footed half-wild pony.

Isaac Cowie from Fort QuAppelle, scouted this country for the Hudsons Bay Company in 1871, seeking a good site for the then new trading post of Last Mountain House, later located near the south end of the lake. More than once these wooded hills were the gathering place of Metis buffalo hunters. Brigades of over a hundred carts have gathered here. Indian woman preparing food over many fires, lighting the night like grounded stars. Cree words mixed with french in merry chansons. Wild revels, solemn councils, at unrecorded meetings long ago.

These are shadows from the past, but in the wild and unspoilt places nature changes little, flower and tree, sky and hill remain the same.