

Hernando County's Blue Flowers of Spring

March brings in our native blue flowers, and while some will grow and bloom well into summer, some are here and gone before you know it. Get out and enjoy them!

Cameras (or rather films) are “insensitive” to the blue color of the flowers of certain plants, and the photos will come out pinkish or pinkish-purple. Therefore using photos alone for identification may be somewhat misleading. When identifying blue-flowered plants be sure to also read both leaf and flower descriptions.



Spiderwort rewards the early bird.

be found along railroad tracks. The plant is perennial, rhizomatous, with leaves that are linear or lanceolate, smooth, and folded lengthwise. The blue-violet flowers each have 3 symmetrical petals and are in clusters, which may droop, on top of the plants.

Blue-eyed grass

by Sue Blakeman

Blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium atlanticum*) is in the iris (iridaceae) family. There are six or seven species found in Florida. Atlanticum flowers are bluish-purple with a yellow center and have 6 petals and 3 stamens. They are perennial and often grow in clumps that resemble grass when not flowering. The leaves are 2-4 mm wide and can reach up to 50 cm in height, although in mowed areas along roadsides or in lawns they tend to be low-growing, with a spreading habit. Blue-eyed grass prefers wet flatwoods, marshes, and other wet areas, including roadsides, however some species may be found in pastures, disturbed areas, city lawns, and even scrub. There is a non-native species, *Sisyrinchium rosulatum*, which is native to South America. It is easy to distinguish from atlanticum by the flowers. Rosulatum flowers are whitish to pale blue-purple, with a yellow eye-ring circled with rose-purple. Atlanticum flowers are much darker with no ring around their yellow center.



Wouldn't it be nice to replace your lawn with these?

Spiderwort

by Sue Blakeman

Spiderwort (*Tradescantia ohiensis*) is now blooming in abundance in the morning hours, although it can and does bloom all year. Its distribution occurs throughout the state. Its habitat tends to be moist roadsides and meadows, but it is also found in city lawns and can even

Lyre-leaf sage

by Sue Blakeman

Lyre-leaf Sage, or as some books list it, Lyre-leaved Sage (*Salvia lyrata*), is in the mint (Lamiaceae) family. It is found throughout the state along roadsides and also in thickets, wooded areas, disturbed sites, and lawns. Lyrata has a square, hairy stem (as do many mints), and it flowers all year, although most profusely in the spring. The leaves are mostly in basal rosettes (on the ground, radiating around the center) and may have purple mixed with green. The basal leaves tend to be broad and the margins may be either entire, toothed, or lobed. The few stem leaves are opposite and small. The upper lip of the tubular flower is 3-lobed, while the lower lip is 2-lobed. The 2-lipped corolla is violet, and the 2-lipped calyx is bluish-purple and hairy. Lyrata's flowers rise in whorls upon the stem.



Catch Lyre-leaf sage along the roadsides in its Spring glory.

Wild Petunia

by Sue Blakeman

Wild Petunia (*Ruellia caroliniensis*) and Blue Twinflower (*Dyschoriste oblongifolia*) are somewhat similar in appearance. The flowers of both are funnel-shaped, with 5 lobes and are bluish to purple. Both bloom spring, summer, and fall throughout the state. One noticeable distinction in the flowers is that Twinflowers have dark dots or streaks; Wild Petunia flowers are solid pale purple or blue (rarely white). The leaves of each are opposite and entire (margins are not toothed) or nearly so. There is a distinct difference in the leaves: Wild Petunia leaves are stalked; Twinflower's leaves are sessile (lack a stem, attaching directly to the stalk). Consult one of the guides listed in the sources list for other more subtle differences.



It's easy to confuse these look-alikes...the twinflower (left) is distinguished from the wild petunia (above) by its spotty petals.

Sky-blue lupine

by Miki Renner

Lupinus diffusus (Sky-blue lupine) is a perennial wildflower with (as the name implies) sky-blue colored flowers. The showy spikes of blue or violet (rarely pink or white) carry large pea-shaped blooms in early spring. The leaves are ovate to elliptic with silky hairs. It is found in sandhills, pine flatwoods, and pine and oak scrub. This plant is occasionally seen on disturbed sandy slopes, such as along roads, where nothing else is growing. It is a shrubby perennial in the Fabaceae family—same as peas and beans. The leaves are clustered at the bottom of the plant when in flower, and are fuzzy-feeling. Each plant may produce numerous tall racemes of flowers.

Lupine can be grown for its display of blue sweet pea shaped flowers on tall spikes in spring. It can be a cottage garden addition, but is eye-catching when planted in large masses such as a ground cover or massing at an entranceway. Lupine grows in full sun with average moisture. Other than requiring good drainage, lupine is not fussy about soil. However, it must be direct seeded. If available, use some of the soil from around the mother plants in the seed bed to insure the presence of the specific nitrogen-fixing bacteria which are associated with roots of the Lupine.

But be careful - the pealike seeds have been wrongly recommended by some as a possible substitute for peas, but don't eat them, they contain a poisonous alkaloid and should be avoided.



Sky-blue lupine is one of our more fleeting pleasures. It's worth your time to schedule a nature walk to visit it.

Recommended Reading

Bell, C. Ritchie and Taylor, Bryan J. *Florida Wildflowers and Roadside Plants*. Laurel Hill Press: Chapel Hill, NC. 1982

Taylor, Walter Kingsley. *The Guide to Florida Wildflowers*. Taylor Publishing: Dallas, TX. 1992

Taylor, Walter Kingsley. *Florida Wildflowers in Their Natural Communities*. University Press of Florida: Gainesville, FL. 1998

This flyer was produced by the Hernando Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society. Please share it!

The Florida Native Plant Society's purpose is the preservation, conservation, and restoration of the native plants and native plant ecosystems of Florida. The Hernando Chapter's goal is to share information with those citizens interested in learning about native plants, their ecosystems, as well as all aspects of biological diversity. For more information about us, visit our Website at www.hcfnp.org. Or attend our public

meetings the first Monday of the Month at the Hernando County Extension Service

Office next door to the fairgrounds at 6:30 p.m.



Viola sororia

by Sid Taylor

Dr. Wunderlin has 26 *Viola* listed in his *Vascular Plants of Florida*, 18 of which are synonyms. Narrowing this list for the color blue and Hernando and Citrus Counties leaves four to be discussed here. Shirley Petty is my personal authority on violets, and I am using her local plant lists. Walter Kingsley Taylor is the reference which aides in descriptions (see below).

Viola sororia (syn: *V. floridana*, *V. palmata* var. *sororia*, and *V. affinis*) is the Common Blue Violet. This violet has 5 floral parts. Flowers are solitary, stalked, spurred, and petal bearded.

Basal leaves are smooth, triangle shaped, and shallowly toothed. Habitat preference is damp and it flowers winter and spring, throughout Florida.

Viola palmata (syn: *V. palmata* var. *triloba*, *V. septemloba*, and *v. esculenta*) is the Early Blue Violet. Flower is the same as above. Basal leaves are dissected into several lobes. (First leaf is simple and entire.) This plant prefers the damp pinelands of Central and North Florida, and blooms winter and spring.

Viola villosa is rare, occurring in the north peninsula south to Hernando County, and in Hamilton County. Common names are Carolina Violet and Southern Downy Violet. Leaf blades are heart-shaped to reniform (kidney-shaped), and densely pubescent with strigose trichomes (sharp, straight, appressed hairs all pointing in the same direction).

Viola walterii is Walter's Violet or Prostrate Blue Violet. It occurs in Citrus, but not in Hernando County, and the panhandle of Florida. Flowers are 2-lipped blue, streaked with purple. Leaves are ovate, green with purple veins above and entirely purple below. It is a violet of upland mixed-forests and bluffs.

Violets have two types of flowers. The early, showy floral bouquet is to attract pollinators and thus insure out-crossing (sharing of genetics). These conspicuous flowers have insect landing-pads formed by interior petals, often spurred and containing nectar.

Later there are cleistogamous flowers which produce seeds that are genetic clones of the parent plant. Enjoy the former floral jewels now. Soon they will exit with hot weather.



When our violets appear, we know Spring is on the way!