

## Herb of the year 2022

### Viola sp, Violets, Pansies, Johnny Jump ups



There are over 500 species in the *Viola* genus, including annuals, perennials, and even subshrubs. Collectively, they are known as violas, though individual distinctive garden types are usually called pansies (*Viola x wittrockiana*), [Johnny-jump-ups](#) (*Viola tricolor*), or violets (*Viola sorolia* and others). As a group, viola flowers include both pure species and hundreds of hybrids and cultivars in many colors and sizes.

The fast-growing varieties grown as garden plants are mostly small-flowered annuals or short-lived perennial violas. Many violas will come back every year thanks to self-seeding. Furthermore, violas are edible, both flowers and leaves and make unexpected garnishes and salad ingredients. The flowers can also be candied for a frosted effect and used to decorate cakes or other confections.

Violas flower primarily in cooler weather. Planting times and length of flowering will depend on climate. In cool climates, they are usually planted in the spring; in climates without winter frost, they can be planted in the fall.

Common Name	Viola, Johnny-jump-up, pansy, violet, sweet violet
Botanical Name	Viola spp.
Family	Violaceae
Plant Type	Annual, perennial
Mature Size	4–10 in. tall, 4–10 in. wide
Sun Exposure	Full, partial
Soil Type	Moist, well-drained
Soil pH	Acidic
Bloom Time	Spring, fall
Flower Color	Purple, orange, white, blue, yellow, red
Hardiness Zones	3–8 (USDA)
Native Area	North America, Europe

The most used violets for medicinal purposes are the European varieties. The most popular is the sweet violet or *Viola odorata*. The petals are deep violet and vary to white. The flowers are very fragrant, hence the name sweet violet. *Viola odorata* is best known as a cough remedy especially for bronchitis (Hoffman, 2003).

*Viola tricolor* or common pansy is also a native of the Old World and has been widely cultivated. Like other cultivars, *V. tricolor* has been used as an expectorant, diuretic, and anti-

inflammatory. Used both internally and topically, this violet is helpful for cystitis, rheumatic complaints, eczema, psoriasis, acne, and topically for babies with cradle cap (Hoffman, 2003).

North American native violets are *Viola papilionacea*, and *V.sororia*. Both are called the common blue violet. There is a lesser known *V. pedata*, the birds foot violet which was once widely collected but is now on the threatened species list for New Hampshire and the endangered list for New York from its over-harvesting. Its leaves have a bird's claw shape instead of heart-shaped common to other violets. If you find this species, don't pick it! The common blue violets have deep purple blooms and heart-shaped leaves. These are the little blue violets that we find in our lawns, meadows and woodlands. Both species *Viola papilionacea* and *V. sororia*, have the same characteristics as their European relatives, and used as a remedy for coughs, colds and sore throats.

All the varieties of violets have a history of similar uses. Very early comparison studies have shown that violets contain twice as much vitamin C as the same weight of orange and more than twice the amount of vitamin A, gram for gram, when compared with spinach! (Erichsen-Brown, 1979).

Early Europeans made syrup of the blossoms and traditionally used it as a laxative for infants and children (Grieve, 1996). Sweet violet, also, has a long history of use as a cough remedy, especially bronchitis, and functions as an expectorant, as well as an anti-inflammatory (Hoffman, 2003).

Many of the older European-based herbalists, such as Grieve, *A Modern Herbal* 1931, and De Bairacli Levy (1973), note that violet has been used, historically, for the treatment of cancer. There are accounts of Native Americans utilizing violet for cancer treatment (Erichsen-Brown, 1979). One recent study concluded that a tincture *Viola* extract, inhibited the proliferation of activated lymphocytes (Hellinger, 2014) as well as negatively affecting other hyper-responsive immune functions. Indicating violets may be useful in the therapy of disorders related to an overactive immune system (Hellinger, 2014).

Violet flowers can be used in teas, to make sweet drinks and syrups as well as garnishes for salads and cakes(sugared). The leaves again used in teas and salads or along with other such greens in soups stew and other recipes.