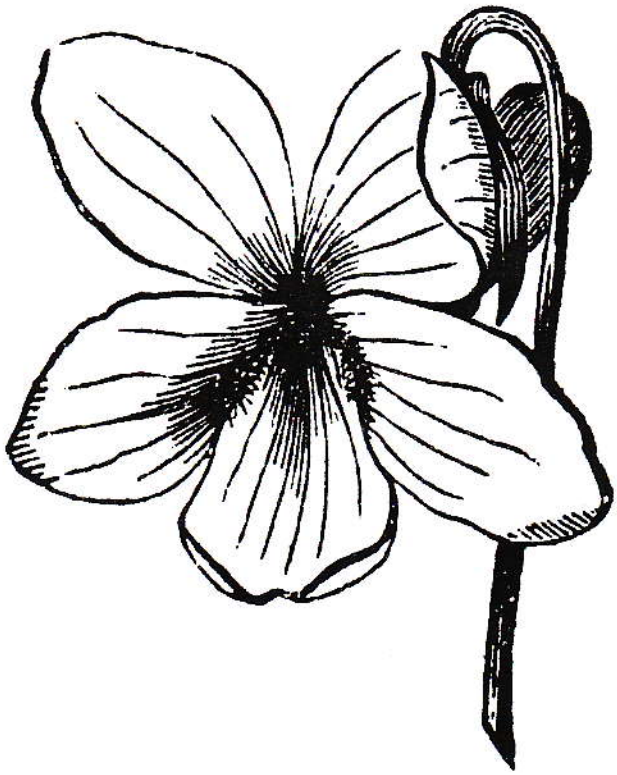
Hybrid Violets

Viola X Brauniae

By Warren Uxley

Violets are a group of plants that make a significant contribution to the explosive displays of wildflowers in the spring. Adding their yellows, blues and whites to the rich pallet of springtime color, they are intensely studied by many nature enthusiasts.

Highly successful, Violets can be found in virtually every habitat in N. America. While showing a preference for moist soils and partial shade, Violets can be found in prairies, swamps, and open meadows as well as on mountaintops and in woodlands. One species – the Common Blue Violet (*Viola sororia*) – has adapted itself to the highly disturbed habitats created by people. It is routinely found in our lawns.



All of the Violet species have 5 petals in their flowers. The upper two petals are identical to one another and this is also the case with the lateral pair. The lower petal has a hollow structure called a spur that projects toward the rear of the flower. In some species the lateral petals will have hairs that point towards the center of the flower. This collection of hairs is called the beard and the presence or absence of beards on the lateral pair is often critical to the identification of Violet species.

More than 20 species of Violets have been documented in Ohio and many are closely related and are found in overlapping habitats. When closely related species share the same habitats they will often hybridize. Here in Ohio 10 different hybrid Violets have been identified and one of them can be found in Lowe-Volk Park.

Braun's Violet (*Viola X brauniae*) is a hybrid between the Pale Violet (*Viola striata*) and the Long-spurred Violet (*Viola rostrata*). The Pale Violet is cream colored while the Long-spurred Violet is light blue; the Pale Violet has a short spur while the name Long-spurred Violet speaks for itself. Finally the Pale Violet has beards on its lateral petals and the Long-spurred Violet lacks the beards.

The hybrid Braun's has a shorter spur that is similar to that of the Pale Violet but it has the light blue color of the Long-spurred species. The hybrid also has the beards of the Pale Violet. The parent species can be invigorated by new genetic material when the hybrids back cross to them. To see the parent plants and their hybrid offspring come to the wildflower program at Lowe-Volk Park April 24th.