

## A Guide to Common Violets

Sheets of purple, lilac and white violets are a feature of the Hills and Holes in the spring. Here is a guide to help you identify the most common species.

First of all, look at the sepals. These are the green or brownish structures behind the petals.



1 Sepals long and pointed



2 Sepals short and rounded

If the sepals are pointed, it's likely to be a Dog Violet. There are two common species of Dog Violet, Early and Common. So next, look at the spur (the coloured part that sticks out behind the flower).

If the spur is the same colour or darker than the flower, as in the first picture, it's most likely to be Early Dog Violet, *Viola reichenbachiana*.

If it's paler than the flower and has a dimple or cleft, it will probably be Common Dog Violet, *Viola riviniana*.



3 Pale, cleft spur

If the sepals are like those in Picture 2, there are two possibilities, Hairy Violet or Sweet Violet.

Sweet Violet, *Viola odorata*, forms patches because it spreads by stolons, a bit like strawberry runners. It sometimes has perfume, but often the scent can't be detected. It's said that this is because violets used to be gathered for sale to mask less pleasant smells, and so the ones with the

strongest perfume didn't get a chance to reproduce. You are most likely to see Sweet Violet at Barnack Hills and Holes in the wooded section. It can be purple, white, lilac or pink.

Hairy Violet, *Viola hirta*, is more likely to be seen in the short grass. The flowers are very similar to Sweet Violet, but usually purple. It can be tricky to tell the difference between the two species, and you might need a hand lens or magnifying glass.

Look at a leaf stalk, and you will see hairs. Hairy Violet is very hairy, and the hairs stick straight out from the stalk. Sweet Violet can be variably hairy, but the hairs are shorter and point down the stalk.



4 Hairy Violet



5 Sweet Violet

**There are other species of violet, but these are the ones you are most likely to see at the Hills and Holes and in the local woods and countryside.**

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