

## Viola odorata

*Viola odorata* is a species of flowering plant in the family *Violaceae*, native to Europe and Asia. This small hardy herbaceous perennial is commonly known as wood violet,[1] sweet violet,[2] English violet,[2] common violet,[2] florist's violet,[2] or garden violet.[2] It has been introduced into the Americas and Australia.

*Viola odorata* can be distinguished by the following characteristics:

These perennial flowers mature at a height of 4–6 in (10–15 cm) and a spread of 8–24 in (20–61 cm).[1]

*V. odorata* is native to Europe and Asia and has been introduced to the Americas and Australia.[citation needed]

The species can be found near the edges of forests or in clearings; it is also a common "uninvited guest" in shaded lawns or elsewhere in gardens.[citation needed]

Several cultivars have been selected for garden use, of which *V. odorata* 'Wellsiana' has gained the Royal Horticultural Society's Award of Garden Merit.[3][4]

The sweet scent of this flower has proved popular, particularly in the late Victorian period, and has consequently been used in the production of many cosmetic fragrances and perfumes.[5] The French are known for their violet syrup, most commonly made from an extract of violets.[citation needed] In the United States, this French violet syrup is used to make violet scones and marshmallows.[citation needed]

The scent of violet flowers is distinctive with only a few other flowers having a remotely similar odor. References to violets and the desirable nature of the fragrance go back to classical sources such as Pliny and Horace when the name "Ion" was in use to describe this flower from which the name of the distinctive chemical constituents of the flower, the ionones, is derived. In 1923, W.A. Poucher wrote that the flowers were widely cultivated both in Europe and the East for their fragrance, with both the flowers and leaves being separately collected and extracted for fragrance, and flowers also collected for use in confectionery galenical syrup[6] and in the production of medicine.[citation needed]

There is some doubt as to whether the true extract of the violet flower is still used commercially in perfumes.[7] It was still used in the early 20th century,[6] but by the time Steffen Arctander was writing in the late 1950s and early 1960s, production had "almost disappeared".[5] Violet leaf absolute, however, remains widely used in modern perfumery.[8][9]

The leaves are edible.[10] Real violet flower extract is available for culinary uses, especially in European countries.[citation needed]

As an ornamental and medicinal plant, Sweet Violet has been cultivated and used medicinally since the Middle Ages. *V. odorata*, along with others in the *Violaceae* family such as *V. tricolor*, has a long history of use in herbalism and folk medicine, particularly Iranian, Greco-Arab, Ayurvedic and Unani traditional health systems.[11] Clinical studies have shown

that *V. odorata* contains alkaloid, glycoside, saponins, methyl salicylate, mucilage and vitamin C,[12] supporting long-held beliefs of its medicinal properties.

In herbal medicine, *V. odorata* has been used for the treatment of whooping cough, headaches, migraine, insomnia, sore throat and epilepsy in children and adults, and clinical studies appear to confirm the safety and efficacy of *V. odorata* syrup in cough, insomnia and migraine treatments, and in treatment of pain, fever, cough, skin disorder, infection and inflammation.[13] [14][15][16][17]

One specific study indicates that *V. odorata* extract given as a preventative/prophylactic is as effective as using corticosteroids reactively to treat specific types of lung disease.[17][18]

The violet flower was a favorite in ancient Greece and became the symbol of Athens. The scent suggested sex, so the violet was an emblematic flower of Aphrodite and of her son, Priapus, the deity of gardens and generation.[19][20][21]

Iamus was a son of Apollo and the nymph Evadne. He was abandoned by his mother at birth. She left him lying in the Arkadian wilds on a bed of violets where he was fed honey by serpents. Eventually, he was discovered by passing shepherds who named him Iamus after the violet (ion) bed.[citation needed]

The goddess Persephone and her companion Nymphs were gathering rose, crocus, violet, iris, lily, and larkspur blooms in a springtime meadow when she was abducted by the god Hades.[22]

*V. odorata* may be the species mentioned in Shakespeare's famous lines:

form, with stolons visible

White *V. odorata*

