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**Wildflower Spot – April 2009**  
John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

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## FIELD PANSY

*Viola bicolor*

By Helen Hamilton, *President of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*

Blooming all over fields, meadows, roadsides and disturbed land, field pansy is a familiar, welcome sign of spring. *Viola bicolor* (flowers white to medium blue with yellow marking) is related to the European pansy, *Viola tricolor* (flowers purple-blue, yellow and white). Field pansy was once thought to be an American variety of the Eurasian *Viola kitaibeliana*, but has more recently been recognized as the only native American pansy.

These plants are most commonly known as Johnny-jump-ups, so named for the plant's quick growth in the spring. Field pansy has also been called the "Confederate violet", the small flowers are thought to be the tears of Confederate soldiers as they left the battlefield. The blue-veined grayish-white morph of the common violet, *V. sororia*, is also commonly known as "Confederate Violet."

Field pansy is an annual, spreading by seed,



and appearing in patches or colonies. The alternate leaves are spoon-shaped; paired stipules grow alongside the leaf and are deeply toothed. The flower has five petals, the lowest heavily veined, and extending back into a spur; the side petals are usually bearded.

This plant tolerates soils ranging from sandy to clay to limestone, and is found in most of eastern U.S. except the extreme north. This species has been used to create some of the pansy cultivars sold in nurseries as annual garden plants. ❖

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**Photo:** Field Pansy (*Viola bicolor*) VNPS

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