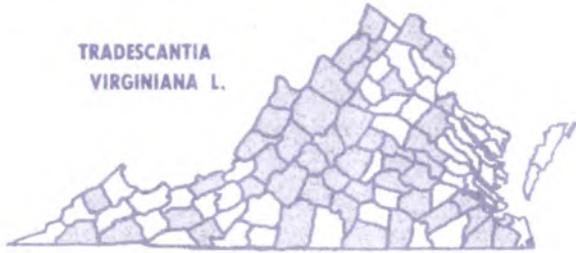


Where to See . . .

Tradescantia virginiana

Virginia spiderwort is widespread in the eastern U.S. where it can be found from New England to Georgia, Minnesota, and Missouri. It is similarly widespread in Virginia, having been documented to occur in about half of the state's counties. Flowering occurs from April to July.

The main threats to this relatively common native species in Virginia are habitat destruction and collection of wild plants for horticulture. South of Virginia, *T. virginiana* becomes significantly less common and is a species of conservation concern in the Carolinas.



Map source - Digital Atlas of the Virginia Flora
www.biol.vt.edu/digital_atlas

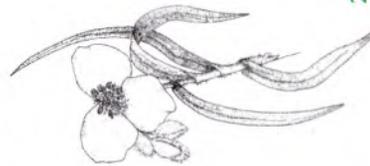
Gardeners should not collect Virginia spiderwort in the wild and should be certain that all native plants purchased are nursery-propagated, not wild-collected. To see and learn more about interesting species of plants native to Virginia, visit our website (www.vnps.org) and contact your local chapter of VNPS (details on website) about programs and wildflower walks in your area. For a list of nurseries selling propagated plants and responsibly collected seeds, see our website or send a SASE to: **Virginia Native Plant Society**, Blandy Experimental Farm, 400 Blandy Farm Lane, Unit 2, Boyce, VA 22620; (540-837-1600 or vnpsfc@shentel.net).

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Virginia Native Plant Society

Conserving Wild Flowers and Wild Places

Blandy Experimental Farm
400 Blandy Farm Lane, Unit 2
Boyce, VA 22620
www.vnps.org



Virginia spiderwort

Tradescantia virginiana

2008 Virginia Wildflower of the Year

Virginia spiderwort

*Tradescantia
virginiana*



2008 Virginia Wildflower of the Year

Virginia Native Plant Society



Tradescantia virginiana

Whether encountered in native woodland or well-tended perennial gardens, Virginia spiderwort is sure to please naturalist and gardener alike. Spiderwort is an herbaceous perennial that arises from a cluster of stout overwintering roots. Stems may be solitary or more commonly clumped, and usually grow unbranched, reaching heights up to 40 centimeters. Stems are smooth or bear scattered short hairs. Leaves are 2 to 5 per stem, attached by means of a leaf sheath that is 1 to 3 centimeters long. Leaf blades are dull green, elongate, ending in a gradually tapered tip, flat or keeled, smooth (without hairs), and 1 to 3.5 decimeters long by 0.5 to 2.5 centimeters wide. Flowers occur in tight clusters located at the stem apex; bracts similar to the leaves occur below each flower. Flowers are ephemeral, each lasting a half day. However, flowers are produced daily for several weeks. Each open flower is elevated above the cluster of buds and spent flowers on a hairy pedicel up to 3.5 centimeters long. The three sepals are green, ovate, and hairy; in open flowers, all but the sepal tips are hidden by petals. Petals are also three in number, broadly ovate, 1.2 to 1.8 centimeters long, and range from purple or blue to rose or white. Six stamens are clustered at the flower center; the densely bearded filaments are topped with yellow anthers. The three-lobed superior ovary is usually obscured by hairy stamens. After flowering, petals dissolve into a few drops of purplish liquid and the pedicels recurve, positioning developing capsular fruits below the cluster of leafy bracts. Capsules are 4 to 7 millimeters long, hairless, and yield 6 or fewer seeds.

Virginia spiderwort and other species of *Tradescantia* appear on lists of both edible and poisonous plants. Leaves and flowers have been reputed to be edible. However, all *Tradescantia* species bear clusters of needle-like crystals (raphides) in their internal tissues and these may be the source of relatively minor skin irritations that can arise in some people upon contact with the plant. Caution is advised before ingesting any wild plant.



... Name derivation

Linnaeus gave spiderwort the scientific name *Tradescantia virginiana*. The genus name commemorates John (the elder) Tradescant, gardener to Charles the First of England and the species name indicates that this plant was first known from specimens collected in Virginia. Tradescant's son (also John) traveled to Virginia in the 1630s and sent many horticultural specimens back to England. The genus *Tradescantia* contains about 70 species found in temperate and tropical regions of the Americas; a group of about 17 species, all native to the U.S., are particularly close relatives of *T. virginiana*, and many are known to hybridize. The spiderwort genus is classified in the plant family Commelinaceae, which in Virginia is also represented by native and invasive species of the genus *Commelina* (commonly known as dayflowers) and *Murdannia keisak*, from Asia.

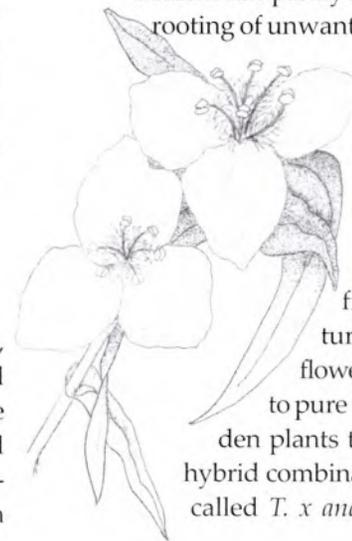
In the Wild...

Virginia spiderwort inhabits dry upland forests, rocky open woods, and wood edges, typically in acid soils. It seems to prefer shaded situations but can be found in full sun. Two other species, *T. ohioensis* and *T. subaspera*, can occur with *T. virginiana* throughout much of eastern North America. The smooth

spiderwort (*T. ohioensis*) can be distinguished by non-hairy pedicels and sepals (except for a tuft of hairs at the apex) and its generally glaucous-waxy leaf surfaces. As its common name implies, the wide-leaved spiderwort (*T. subaspera*) differs by leaf blades wider than the other two species and also wider than its own leaf sheath circumference (blades are often 2 to 5 centimeters wide). Bumblebees are the most important pollinators for all three species and natural hybrids occur. These natural hybrids can be recognized by the commingling of characteristics otherwise typical of individual species.

... In the Garden

This species adapts well to cultivation, is easy to grow, and reliably makes an attractive garden specimen. It grows best in fertile loam, and prefers somewhat acid soils, but is adaptable. Moderate moisture will be adequate if grown in light shade; more water may be necessary for full sun. Cutting stems back after flowering stimulates re-blooming. Spiderworts can be propagated by rootstock division or seed. Fresh seed germinates readily; dry seed benefits from a few weeks of cold stratification. Under certain garden conditions Virginia spiderwort can become rampantly aggressive, requiring regular uprooting of unwanted seedlings and thinning (division) of adult plants.



Tradescantia virginiana is known to hybridize with *T. ohioensis* and *T. subaspera*. Numerous horticultural selections have been developed from hybrid populations that mix genetic material from all three species. Horticultural cultivars have a wide range of flower color, ranging from deep purple to pure white. Many (perhaps most) garden plants that are labeled *T. virginiana* are hybrid combinations of all three and should be called *T. x andersoniana*.