



SWEET VIOLET

Viola odorata



Family Violaceae

Description

The flowers of sweet-scented Violet appear at the end of August and finish blooming by late November.

Violets are perennial and the leaves are heart-shaped and slightly downy. The flowers are deep purple, giving their name to the colour that is called after them. There are also lilac, pale rose-coloured or white flowering varieties. Double forms as well as single are grown. The single flowers have five sepals with spurs protruding at their bases, and five unequal petals. The two upper petals curve back. The stems are long and shaped like a shepherd's crook.

Habitat

Violets grow in the shady part of the garden and colonize an area with their long runners or stolons. These form roots at the nodes and anchor into the ground. They can quickly establish themselves and cover an area.

Cultivation

Separate rooted runners or stolons in autumn from older plants. These detached plants should be firmly heeled into the ground. Violets can also be grown from seed. They like to grow in rich soil that is slightly acidic and prefer shade. Add mulch and water well in the summer months to prevent the plants from drying out.

Uses

Up to the 1930's violets were used as a treatment for breast cancer and lung cancers by doctors. Today it is still used in natural therapies for cancer treatment especially after surgery to help prevent secondary tumours. Using violets as part of a cancer cure is yet to be scientifically proven. Violets are widely used for treatment of coughs, bronchitis and catarrh. The leaves of violets are high in flavonoids and vitamins which act as anti-oxidants to fight the free radicals in the body known to be cancer triggers. To ingest fresh leaves can be added to salads. Traditionally violets were used for bruises as either a strong infusion or poultice. This medicinal use is still relevant today. Cosmetically violets are still used as a fragrance. Sadly the extraction process is increasingly becoming chemically synthesised as it takes over a 100Kg of flowers to extract 60gm of essence.

Infusion

Place 15gm of flowers in 250ml of cold water and soak. Cover the saucepan and bring to the boil and infuse for 10 minutes. When cooled, strain and bottle. Keep refrigerated. Drink a ¼ cup per day for coughs, colds, respiratory or digestive problems. As a drink, 2tsp fresh or 1tsp dried flowers can be infused for 5 minutes. Add some chamomile flowers if you want a more relaxing brew.

Syrup

Place 150gms of fresh flowers in a jar. Pour over 250mls boiling water and cover. Leave to macerate for 12 hours. Strain into a saucepan and add 1kg of sugar. Boil for 1 hour or until it has syrupy consistency. Store in a tightly sealed glass bottle. Dosage is 3 to 4tsp per day. It is an expectorant, laxative and sedative.

Leaves can be used as a poultice on skin cancers in conjunction with taking them internally.

Culinary

Violets are still widely used in Europe. Violet syrup with lemon syrup and acetic acid (vinegar) is a refreshing summer drink and an ingredient of oriental sherbet. Honey of violets is made by infusing violets in warm honey until their fragrance is imparted. The hot water cupboard is good for this. A sweet called 'violet plate' is made by infusing violets in lemon juice, adding sugar then boiling until it is candied. Crystallized violets are made by dipping flowers in a lightly beaten egg white then castor sugar. When dried use these for sweets and to decorate cakes and desserts. Violet flowers can be added to fresh fruit or vegetable salads and sandwiches. Use the leaves in moderation. Warning - If you use large quantities of leaves they can cause nausea or vomiting. Violets were prized because of their fragrance and were used as a strewing herb on floors and in washing waters and toilet vinegars. Violets readily impart both their fragrance and colour into liquids and vinegar.

Reference Karina Hilterman

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