

## Fen Violet, *Viola Persicifolia*

### Description

The fen violet is one of the rarest and most endangered species in Ireland. Most beautiful of all our native violets, the fragile-looking flowers are a pale, bluish-white in colour. The flowers are almost circular in full-face profile and are around 10mm in diameter. The flower also has a short, greenish spur. The plant has no basal leaf rosette and the leaves are ovate-lanceolate, cut off abruptly, or somewhat notched at the base – rather reminiscent of a teaspoon in shape.



Seeds germinate in spring on bare patches of peaty soil above the water table, but the violet only establishes new plants if the water table drops and the soil surface becomes drier. Normal open flowers appear in May, followed by small closed bud-like ones from June onwards. Both flower types produce around 18 seeds per capsule. Seed is squeezed out of the drying valves of the fruit capsule after it splits and dispersal distances are small and juvenile plants develop close to the parent plant.

### Distribution

In Northern Ireland, fen violet is confined to rocky limestone lake shores of Upper Lough Erne and to turloughs or vanishing lakes around Fardrum. The best chance to see them is in the month of May. However, they haven't been seen since 1992.

### Action

Seed being collected for preservation and cultivation at the National Botanic Gardens, Glasnevin, Dublin.

One of the sites for this species, in Fermanagh, Fardrum and Roosky Turloughs, is under ASSI designation.

### Further Information

<http://www.habitas.org.uk/priority/species.asp?item=2938>

### MLA Species Champion

