

Oxalis violacea

[Synonyms : *Acetosella violacea*, *Ionoxalis violacea*, *Ionoxalis violacea* var. *trichophora*, *Oxalis violacea* var. *trichophora*, *Sassia tinctoria*, *Sassia violacea*]

VIOLET WOODSORREL is a bulbous perennial. Native to eastern North America it has green-throated, yellowish-centred, pale mauve to pale pink (rarely white) flowers.

It is also known as Jocoyol, Pink wood sorrel, Purple oxalis, Purple wood sorrel, Shamrock, Sheep sorrel, Socoyol, Trefoil, Violet oxalis, and Wood sorrel.

The leaves close as the light fails in the evening and during daylight hours if the weather is overcast.

The flowers are pollinated by small bees and by flies.

Warning – the perennial is said by some to be poisonous for children and could be poisonous for adults if taken in large amounts. Grazing animals usually avoid it.

Violacea is derived from Latin *viola* (violet-coloured).

While the plant seems to have provided food for all members of the Cherokee and some of the Apache tribes, it appears to have been harvested and prepared primarily for the children in the Pawnee, Ponca and Omaha tribes.

Apparently the Pawnee, Ponca and Omaha Indians were also convinced that the pounded bulb (added to fodder) could be instrumental in enhancing their horses' speed.

A few North American Indian tribes seem to have identified medicinal properties in the plant. For the Cherokee it seems to have been interchangeable with other close relatives such as procumbent yellow-sorrel (*Oxalis corniculata*) and to have been valued by them particularly for children suffering from hookworms (for which an infusion was both taken internally and applied externally). The leaves were chewed to ease a sore throat or mouth, and a leaf infusion (made into a cream with sheep grease) was applied to sores. They also used it to stem vomiting and also in the treatment of cancer.

Some records indicate that European settlers on the North American Continent cooked the leaves in fruit pies as an alternative to garden rhubarb (*Rheum x hybridum*) or gooseberry (*Ribes uva-crispa*). More recent authorities note that if eaten in moderation both the sharp-tasting leaves and the flowers are edible raw and the leaves can also be cooked as flavouring. Records also claim that the leaves have been used to make a lemony-tasting drink.

Violet woodsorrel is often cultivated as an ornamental.

The plant is viewed as a noxious weed in various regions in Australia.

Medicinally, a leaf tea have been taken in the southern State of New Mexico for expelling intestinal worms and in some areas raw leaves have been eaten in early Spring as a blood tonic. It would seem that today it can be used in the treatment of initial stages of cancer and that a plant infusion has been given to children to rid them of hookworm.