



Virginia Bluebells (*Mertensia virginiana*) - BTC Species of the Month, April 2011



Did you know?

Virginia Bluebells...

- Provide early spring nectar for butterflies
- Are part of the Forget-me-Not (Boraginaceae) family
- Have flowers with no scent

Virginia Bluebells

Photo credit: Hoodedwarbler12 (wikipedia)

Habitat: Clearings and edges of moist woodlands, low slopes, river floodplains

Blooms: April - June

Range: Found throughout mid-United States and southern Ontario reaching its northern limit by Owen Sound.

Status: Sensitive, S3 ([what does this S-rank mean?](#))

Virginia Bluebells on the Niagara Escarpment

Look for Virginia Bluebells soaking up the spring sun on deciduous forest floors before the trees above leaf out.

If you are lucky enough to stumble upon a patch in bloom you will be presented with a magnificent sight as a sea of blue stretches out before you.

Virginia Bluebells are provincially 'vulnerable', sensitive to disturbance, and have particular habitat requirements. The Niagara Escarpment, with its relative abundance of deciduous forests, low slopes and moist environments creates ideal habitats for these spring beauties.

The BTC is acquiring and stewarding Niagara Escarpment land so that the Escarpment will continue to support species like Virginia Bluebells.



Identification:

Medium-sized plant (up to 70 cm tall) with clusters of drooping sky-blue flowers.

Leaves:

Broad and smooth; Elliptical; Arranged alternately up the succulent stem; Blue-green in colour with a soft look to them.

By mid-summer, the foliage dies back as the plant goes dormant, disappearing until the following Spring.

Flowers:

Clusters of buds start out pink, becoming a brilliant, sky blue in full bloom; 5 petals unite to form a tubular bell-shaped form; Protruding from each bell are 5 white stamen awaiting the arrival of spring pollinating insects.

Blooms between April & June and flowers remain for up to 3 weeks.

Growing Virginia Bluebells:

The brilliant flower colour and size of Virginia Bluebells make it a great native plant to add to your garden. It prefers partial shade in moist light, sandy or medium-loamy soil. If left undisturbed, it can grow from rhizomes, forming a large colony.

Please watch where you tread. Virginia Bluebells have succulent leaves and stems that are easily damaged from being touched or trampled.



Photo credit: Bill Swindaman
(flickr)

Virginia Bluebell buds start pink becoming sky blue in full bloom.

Drooping flowers protect the pollen from getting washed away by rain or dew.



Bruce Trail
CONSERVANCY



Celebrating Forests

Virginia Bluebells are a favorite woodland wildflower.

Watch for more forest species in upcoming BTC Species-of-the-month, in celebration of the [International Year of Forests](#) 2011.

Learn more about forests and other Niagara Escarpment habitats in our [Biodiversity & Me booklet](#).

