Northern White Violet (*Viola macloskeyi ssp. pallens*)

Identification:

This white violet has leaves as broad as they are wide, with very blunt tips, giving them a very round appearance. The flowers and leaves are on separate stalks, but the flowers are taller than the leaf stems, even so, they are no taller than 5 inches. Notice the purple nectar guides on the lower petals. These lines direct pollinators to the cache of nectar tucked back in the spur of the flower. The stem of the flower generally has no hairs, lending it second name – smooth white violet.

Look for northern white violet in wet and shaded areas, along stream banks and beside springs. You may see more than one when you spot it as it spreads by runners along the ground. Bend down and sniff the small half inch blossom. It usually has a sweet fragrance. It will be worth your effort.

Natural History:

The leaves and flowers of the northern white violet, like other violets, are edible and healthy, packing a good dose of Vitamins A and C. The flowers are so beautiful, they make wonderful candies and cake decorations.

Roman mythology holds that the powerful god Zeus, fell in love with a beautiful nymph named Io. Upon learning this, Zeus' jealous wife Hera, turned Io into a white heifer. Unhappy with her situation, and having to eat roughage she was not used to, Io cried. Feeling pity on Io, but unable to undo his wife's deed, Zeus caused Io's tears to turn into flowers that we now call violets wherever they landed on earth. You may see that Io was indeed very unhappy as violets occur in many different habitats, some in profusion.

Like other violets, the Northern White violet produces two types of flowers. The showy ones we see atop the hairless stalk is the one hoping to attract pollinators. The job of the pollinator is to travel from flower to flower, getting dusted with pollen and rubbing that pollen on the pistil of neighboring plants of the same species. In this way, genetic material is combined, giving the next generation beneficial traits from each parent plant. This helps the species respond to varying environmental conditions from one generation to the next. However, if cross-pollination like this does not work for some reason, violets have a "Plan B". Late in the year, what is called a cleistogamous flower may be produced. These flowers are close to the ground and their petals

never open. Its stamens fertilize the pistil, producing seed that is genetically like the parent plant. Seed pods are produced as they are with the open flowers, and when dried, the seeds shoot forth to start another plant. And, if seeds are not enough, northern white violet produces more plants by sending out runners, which develop roots and shoots just like wild strawberries.