

Wildflower in Focus

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Artwork by Tina Thieme Brown

Wild Blue Phlox

Phlox divaricata L.

Phlox Family (*Polemoniaceae*)



Wild blue phlox blooms along rivers and streams throughout Maryland, including the Potomac River, where it can be found growing in concert with golden ragwort. These medium-tall wildflowers form a springtime display rivaling that of the more famous Virginia bluebells.

Flowers: Violet or blue (rarely white), 3/4 - 2" across, 5-lobed with lobes united to form a narrow tube at the back. Lobes bluntly rounded at the tip and often shallowly notched. In artist Tina Thieme Brown's words: "the flower buds are a blue-violet

spiral dance." Flowers grow in showy terminal clusters.

Leaves: Opposite, simple, sessile, entire, ovate-lanceolate to oblong, 1 - 3" long.

Height: 8 - 20".

Habitat and Range: Moist woods, bottomland woods, floodplains; eastern U.S. and southeastern Canada.

Similar Species: Wild sweet William (*P. maculata*) has purple or pink (rarely white) flowers and blooms in late spring and summer. This plant is 1 - 3' tall and grows in wet meadows, seeps and on streambanks. The familiar garden phlox (*P. paniculata*) blooms later still (from July through October). It is a very tall plant (2 - 6') with deep pink flowers in the wild (other colors in cultivation). Moss phlox or moss pink (*P. subulata*) is a creeping species of rocky habitats. It has rose-pink to white flowers and small, linear or awl-shaped leaves. Creeping phlox (*P. stolonifera*), with violet or reddish-purple (rarely white) flowers, grows in the mountains. Consult Brown and Brown's **Herbaceous Plants of Maryland** for descriptions and illustrations of other species found in the state.

Blooming Time: April to June.

Locations: Potomac River, Rock Creek, Cabin John Creek, Furnace Branch and Monocacy River (on and near Sugarloaf Mountain), Cylburn Arboretum (Baltimore), Oregon Ridge Park—Ivy Hill, Susquehanna State Park, Antietam Creek, Turkey Run Park (Virginia). Consult Fleming, Lobstein and Tuftys **Finding Wildflowers in the Washington-Baltimore Area** for additional locations of wild blue phlox and other phlox species.

"Wildflower in Focus" is adapted from **An Illustrated Guide to Eastern Woodland Wildflowers and Trees: 350 Plants Observed at Sugarloaf Mountain, Maryland** (Choukas-Bradley and Brown, University of Virginia Press, 2008).