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Spiderwort is VNPS Wildflower of the Year

The VNPS 2008 Wildflower of the Year (WOY) is spiderwort (*Tradescantia virginiana*). This herbaceous perennial plant occurs throughout much of the eastern portion of the U.S. and is widespread in Virginia. Spiderwort blooms from April to July. The small flowers occur in clusters at the ends of the stems, atop several elongate bracts. Flowers have three petals that range from purple to rose or, rarely, white. Densely hairy stamens provide, perhaps, the easiest way to recognize spiderworts. Also, stalks of spent flowers droop below the flower cluster yielding an aspect reminiscent of spindly spider legs.

Not all local spiderworts, however, are Virginia spiderwort. This year's WOY has two close relatives that also occur at scattered locations throughout the state:

T. ohioensis and *T. subaspera*. These three spiderwort species are quite similar, differing in leaf dimensions, leaf waxiness, and hairiness of stems, leaves, and sepals. The species are sufficiently closely related that both natural and artificial (horticultural) hybrids occur. In fact, *Hortus III* indicates that most garden plants labeled *T. virginiana* are probably hybrid combinations of all three of these species and should be called *T. x andersoniana*. Wild plants with leaf blades about as broad as their sheaths and not prominently glaucous (waxy), uniformly hairy pedicels and sepals, and smooth (hairless) stems can be identified as "true" *T. virginiana* and can be expected to be much more abundant than hybrids with other combinations of these characteristics.

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