



# native plant society of bc

## *Collinsia parviflora* (small-flowered blue-eyed Mary)

**Meaning:** *Collinsia* is named after Zaccheus Collins, a mineralogist and botanist who lived from 1764 to 1831; *parviflora* comes from the Greek *parvus* (small) and *flora* (flower).

**Description:** *Collinsia parviflora* is an annual that can be 3 to 40 cm tall. The leaves are opposite, smooth or minutely hairy, and often purplish beneath. The inflorescence is a cluster of flowers with a blue lower lip and a white to pinkish white upper lip. *Collinsia parviflora* flowers from March to July.



Photo: Dawn Hanna

**Habitat:** Small-flowered blue-eyed Mary grows in very dry to moist conditions in meadows, on rock outcrops, in sand dunes and in open forest from sea level to the subalpine.

**Range:** *Collinsia parviflora* is native to North America. It occurs from the Yukon Territory and Alaska south to California. In Canada, it is found in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and Nova Scotia.

**Wildlife notes:** According to the Xerces Society, small-flowered blue-eyed Mary is recognized as attracting a large number of native bees. It is also a larval food plant for the critically imperilled Taylor's checkerspot (*Euphydryas editha taylori*) in BC.

**Other notes:** Not only does *Collinsia parviflora* produce nectar within its flowers, it also has nectaries (nectar packets) that occur near the leaves. It's thought that this nectar attracts primarily ants -- whose presence provides protection from herbivores. As well, some BC populations of small-flowered blue-eyed Mary are polymorphic for a gene that causes purple-spotted leaves. (Read *Wildflower Genetics* by Anthony Griffiths and Fred Ganders for more details.)

**First Nations use:** Although there is no record of First Nations in BC using small-flowered blue-eyed Mary, at least two First Nations groups in the US were known to use it. The Navajo used it as a veterinary aid, to make a horse run fast.; the Ute used it to treat sore skin.

**Gardening use:** Small-flowered blue-eyed Mary can make for a beautiful spring groundcover in a dry garden. Grow it from seed or from nursery-grown plugs or plants.