



Invasive Plant Alert¹

Spanish Bluebells

Hyacinthoides hispanica (Mill.)
Rothm.

Spanish Bluebells is a bulb-forming perennial plant that can aggressively compete with native spring-blooming wildflower species. It can spread rapidly by sending out underground runners, where new bulbs form or spreading by seed. The bulbs can withstand garden composting. The Spanish Bluebell is native to Spain and Portugal, and parts of Africa. Although invasive, it continues to be promoted as a shade-tolerant, easy-to-grow bulb by some home gardeners.



Figure 1. Bluebells in woodlands Photo: Lanhydrock Garden in Cornwall, UK via Wikipedia Commons.

Where to Look

Spanish Bluebell can be found in open and shady forest areas, and woodland edges. It blooms through the summer, when conditions are right. It is currently reported to be growing in the wild in Delaware, Virginia, North Carolina, the Northwest, and in Canada.

Identifying the Plant

There are many different types of bluebells. Our native Virginia Bluebell (*Mertensia virginica*) is a

woodland wildflower also with bell-shaped flowers.

Spanish Bluebells may be identified by:

- Flowers borne on short stalks (raceme), each with 6-8 flowers
- Conical or bell-shaped flowers with spread out tips that hang when in bloom
- Pale blue-purple flowers, oblong to strap-shaped, under 1 inch
- Flowers on all sides of upright stem, usually nodding
- Almost no scent
- Usually blue anthers
- Each plant has 4-8 leaves
- Linear or oblong leaf shape, often with a blunt tip
- Leaves 8-20 inches long and up to 1.4 inches wide
- Stalks up to 18 inches tall

Other types of bluebells may vary in color (from deep blue, to white and pinkish purple).

Hyacinthoides non-scripta tend to have smaller, tube-like flowers (often with the tips curled back) that flower on one side of the stem only, and more narrow leaves (about half an inch wide). Other bluebells may have a distinct scent.



Figure 2. Bell-shaped flowers (Photo: Dan Wihela via Flickr).

How to get rid of it?

It is best to dig out Spanish Bluebells while they are in leaf, as the bulbs are almost impossible to find when the plant is dormant. Loosen soil around the bulbs to a good depth and manually remove all roots. The plant is reported to be strongly resistant to herbicide.



Figure 3. Photo: Kym Pokorny via Wikipedia Commons.

Resources

Plant Invaders of Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas, 4th ed. (2010).
<http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/pubs/midatlantic/midatlantic.pdf>

University of Georgia, Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health, http://wiki.bugwood.org/Hyacinthoides_hispanica

Plantlife (UK), Bluebells for Britain
<http://www.plantlife.org.uk/uploads/documents/Blubells-for-Britain-report.pdf>

¹ This species has been identified as a potential or emerging threat to natural areas in the mid-Atlantic region