

# Quick Flash Guide to the Fireflies of West Virginia

Flashing fireflies are harbingers of summer in West Virginia, with flashing typically beginning in May and lasting until August. Many night-active, flashing male fireflies can be identified to species based entirely on their unique flash pattern and color. Therefore, this guide is designed for identification based on this flash behavior!

If you see:

- **Yellow flashes** go to “*Photinus*” subheading, but see also “Snappy Single Sync,” “Heebie-Jeebies,” and “Spring Treetop Flasher” species
- **Green flashes** go to “*Photuris*” subheading
- **Orange flashes** go to “*Pyractomena*” subheading
- **Continuous glowing** go to “*Phausis/Pleotomus*” subheading

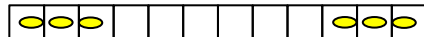
In the flash pattern depictions below, each box represents 1 second, ○ represents flashes, ∩ represents flickering flashes, and ○ represents prolonged flashes (12 seconds of flash behavior for each species is depicted). Be aware that higher temperatures increase the speed of flash patterns, and lower temperatures decrease the speed of flash patterns. Fireflies will not flash below 50°F. Species length information and flash charts were adapted from “Fireflies, Glowworms, and Lightning Bugs” by Lynn Faust.<sup>†</sup>

Please contact [westvirginiافireflies@gmail.com](mailto:westvirginiافireflies@gmail.com) if you believe you see a firefly that has an asterisk next to its name in this guide, or for any firefly related questions! For more detailed species descriptions, flash animations, and general firefly facts please visit <https://westvirginiافirefly.wixsite.com/westvirginiافirefly>.

## Photinus

### Fiery Firefly

*Photinus ardens*

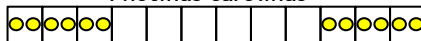


open wetland areas  
mid-late June

1 hour after sunset, lasting ~1 hour<sup>††</sup>  
9.5–12 mm in length<sup>††</sup>

### Synchronous Firefly

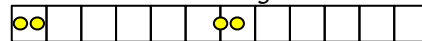
*Photinus carolinus*



small forest clearings near streams  
mid-June–mid-July  
~10:30PM to ~12AM  
11–15 mm in length

### Double Cousin

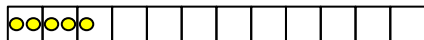
*Photinus consanguineus*



shrubland, forest  
late June  
dusk  
7.5–11 mm in length<sup>†††</sup>

### Cattail Flash-Train Firefly

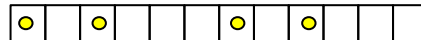
*Photinus consimilis*



wetlands, riverbanks  
June–mid-July  
after dark, lasting ~1 hour  
10–11 mm in length

### Mr. Mac

*Photinus macdermotti*



open forests near streams  
mid-June–early July  
sunset  
10 mm in length

### Little Gray

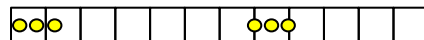
*Photinus marginellus*



forests, margin areas  
late June–July  
sunset–dark  
6–9 mm in length

### Murky Flash-Train

*Photinus obscurellus*



open wetland areas  
late May–early June  
dusk, lasting 1–2 hours  
7–11 mm in length<sup>††</sup>

### Common Eastern Firefly

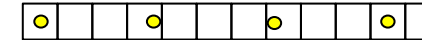
*Photinus pyralis*



widespread  
mid-June–August  
sunset–midnight  
9–19 mm in length

### Creekside Tree Blinker

*Photinus sabulosus*



in trees near openings  
June–July  
late dusk, lasting ~45 mins  
6–8 mm in length

### Yellow-Bellied Firefly

*Photinus scintillans*



forest trails, open fields/lawns  
June–July  
sunset  
6.5–8.5 mm in length

<sup>†</sup> Faust, L.F. 2017. Fireflies, Glowworms, and Lightning Bugs: Identification and Natural History of the Fireflies of the Eastern and Central United States and Canada. University of Georgia Press, Athens, Georgia, 30602.

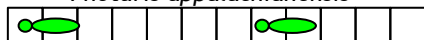
<sup>††</sup> Lloyd, J. E. 1969. Flashes, Behavior and Additional Species of Nearctic Photinus Fireflies (Coleoptera: Lampyridae). The Coleopterists Bulletin, 23(2): 29–40.

<sup>†††</sup> Green, J.W. 1956. Revision of the Nearctic species of Photinus (Lampyridae: Coleoptera). Proceedings of the California Academy of Sciences, 28(4): 561–613.

<sup>††††</sup> Lloyd, J. E. 2018. A Naturalist's Long Walk Among Shadows: Of North American Photuris. Bridger Press, Gainesville, FL, USA, 477 pp.

## Appalachian Dot Dash Firefly\*

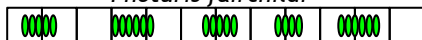
*Photuris appalachianensis*



high elevation wetlands  
Time of year: late June–early July  
after dark–midnight  
13–14 mm in length<sup>†††</sup>

## Fairchild's Firefly

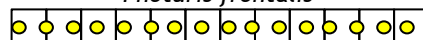
*Photuris fairchildi*



woodland openings, fields  
early June–mid-June  
late dusk–midnight  
~15 mm in length

## Snappy Single Sync\*

*Photuris frontalis*



forested wetlands & bottomland  
late June  
late dusk, lasting 1–2 hours  
11–17 mm in length

## Heebie-Jeebies

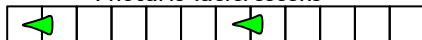
*Photuris hebes*



tree margins near water, fields  
late June  
dusk, lasting 1–2 hours  
10–12 mm in length

## July Comet

*Photuris lucicrescens*



riverside, moist forest, edge  
June–July  
late dusk–midnight  
15–20 mm in length

## Potomac Firefly\*

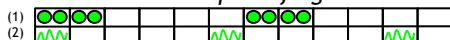
*Photuris potomaca*



early succession along Potomac  
~early June–early July  
dusk and into the night  
Variable length

## Spring 4-Flasher

*Photuris quadrifulgens*



open areas bordered by trees  
late May–early June  
~1–2 hours after sunset  
12–20 mm in length  
*More likely to see pattern 1.*  
*May emit 2–5 flashes in cluster.*

## Slow Glows

*Photuris "slow glows"*



tree margins near water, fields  
early June–early July  
late dusk–midnight  
11–17 mm in length  
*Emits a single flash early in evening*

## Christmas Lights

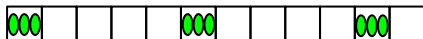
*Photuris tremulans*



woodland openings, fencerows  
early June–mid-June  
after dark–midnight  
10–12.5 mm in length  
*Could see either pattern 1 or 2.*

## Variable Triple Flash

*Photuris versicolor*



widespread  
mid-June–early July  
dusk and into the night  
13–18 mm in length

## Did you know?

West Virginia is home to 32 species of firefly, including the ones you see on this sheet and several other species that are day-active and do not glow or flash as adults.

# Pyractomena

## Spring Treetop Flasher

*Pyractomena borealis*



forests, trees along open areas  
late April–May  
dusk  
14–22 mm in length

## Marsh Flicker

*Pyractomena dispersa*



wetland and adjacent areas  
late May–early June  
dusk–midnight  
7–14 mm in length

## Candle Firefly

*Pyractomena angulata*

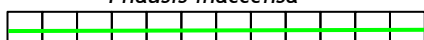


forests, margins  
mid-June  
after dark–midnight  
9–17 mm in length

# Phausis / Pleotomus

## Shadow Ghost\*

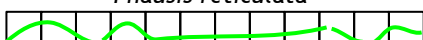
*Phausis inaccensa*



forest, on forest floor  
mid-June–early July  
late dusk and into the night  
Note: only females glow, stationary  
4–6 mm in length

## Blue Ghost\*

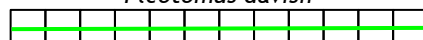
*Phausis reticulata*



forest  
late May–July  
just after dark, lasting ~1.5hr  
6–9 mm in length

## Davis's Oddball\*

*Pleotomus davisii*



forest, on forest floor  
~ mid-June  
after dark and into the night  
Note: only females glow, stationary  
12–20 mm in length