



Liverwort

Hepatica nobilis

Buttercup Family (Ranunculaceae)

Zones: 3-7

Full Sun to Partial Shade

Moderate Water

Location: Medicinal Garden

This is one of the first woodland wildflowers to bloom in the spring. Its small flowers are typically bright blue, but are occasionally white or pink. The flowers emerge in the garden from February to May and have a fresh, delicate scent. They emerge on hairy, leafless stems. The leaves of this plant are basal with a leathery texture, and have a dark green coloring that turns somewhat reddish with age.

In medieval times, the Doctrine of Signatures suggested that the leaves, which are liver-shaped, would be useful in treating liver ailments. *Hepatica nobilis* is still used today for medicinal purposes. Although poisonous in large amounts, its leaves and flowers may be used as an astringent, a demulcent for slow-healing injuries, and also as diuretic.

The seeds of this plant are collected and dispersed by ants. Elaisomes on the seeds, which are ant-attracting appendages, are rich in nutrients. The ants gather and eat the elaisomes and then discard the rest of the seeds, which are still intact and viable. The seeds will then germinate in the location where they were discarded. This process is called myrmecochory.

The distribution of *Hepatica nobilis* is throughout North America, Europe and Japan.