
Wildflower Spot - April 2008
John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

ROUND-LOBED HEPATICA

Hepatica americana

By Helen Hamilton, *President of the John Clayton Chapter, VNPS*

This small native plant is one of the earliest spring wildflowers, blooming March through April. With no stems the plant has large basal leaves with 3 rounded lobes. Hairy flower stalks emerge from a tattered clump of leathery, burgundy-brown tinted leaves from the previous year. New leaves appear only after the flowers bloom. Light blue to lavender or white flowers are easy to find in the forest litter, 1 inch across, on 8-inch tall stalks. The flowers have numerous stamens, are without true petals, the petal-like 5-9 sepals surrounded by 3 bracts.

Round-lobed Hepatica grows in dry or moist upland woods over most of Virginia. The range is from Quebec to Minnesota and Manitoba and south to Georgia, Tennessee and Missouri.

Widely used by Native Americans and colonists to treat many ailments, the plant served most commonly as a leaf tea for liver disorders. The common names, Hepatica and Liverleaf refer to the leaves being 3-lobed (as is the liver) and



becoming dark in color, with age. Treating organ problems with the plants that most suggest them is known as the “doctrine of signatures,” a former practice that originated in China. “Liverleaf” could also refer to the brownish color of the overwintering leaves. ❖

Photo: *Hepatica (Hepatica americana)* taken by Helen Hamilton
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