



Cultivation Notes

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Hepatica

Family RANUNCULACEAE (Buttercup Family)

Hepatica nobilis P. Mill. var. *obtusata* (Pursh) Steyermark

[formerly *Hepatica americana* (DC.) Ker-Gawl.]

A Rhode Island Native Plant

by Carolyn Curtis

The name "*hepatica*" is derived from the Greek word meaning "liver," an allusion to the shape of the leaves. European herbalists took the shape of the leaf to be a sign that *Hepatica* could cure liver diseases; Native American tribes also used *Hepatica* for a variety of complaints.

About two inches long and four inches broad, the leaves of *Hepatica* remain a dark brownish-green over the winter. New leaves appear after the flowers, which bloom very early in the spring. The showy sepals of the flowers (which are lacking petals) are white, pink, or pastel shades of blue and purple; they open with the morning sun but close and droop in the evening, in cloudy weather, and on cold days.

Hepatica is listed by the Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program as a species of "Concern," known to grow in only five sites in the state. It is more common in other parts of New England, especially in areas with less acidic soils, and may sometimes be found blooming while there is still snow on the ground.



CULTIVATION NOTES

Hepatica nobilis P. Mill. var. *obtusata* (Pursh) Steyermark

Hepatica

Perennial. White, pink, pale purple or blue flowers in April or early May. 3 to 4" tall, preferring an open woodland with slightly acid, humus-rich soil. Plant in early spring or in the fall. It has a fibrous root system and the clumps enlarge with age.

Planting depth and spacing: Space 8 to 12 inches apart. With shoots just barely above the earth, plant crowns at about soil level. Mulch with small leaves, tucking them around and beneath the foliage. Protect for the winter with a little marsh hay to prevent damage from freezing rain and sunscald.

Propagation from division: Use nursery-grown stock and divide clumps in the fall. Leave two or three buds in each division. It is also possible to move clumps immediately after blooming and before new leaves appear, as long as soil remains on the roots.

Propagation from seed: Since seed is difficult to collect, Curtis and Brumbach in *Propagation of Wildflowers* suggest the following method: "have a few mother plants in loose humus-filled soil that can be weeded. They will take care of their own seed sowing and give plenty of small plants." The seeds germinate after one winter and flower after two or three winters.

Comments: *DO NOT DIG PLANTS IN THE WILD.* Obtain plants only from your own property or where you have written permission to dig, or purchase from a reputable local source such as the Rhode Island Wild Plant Society or the New England Wild Flower Society.

My own notes:

References:

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