



***Hepatica americana* (DC.) Ker (*H. triloba*)**
Hepatica, round-lobed hepatica, liverleaf, liverwort.

Ranunculaceae (Buttercup Family)

Blooming season: April- May.

Plant:

Fibrous rooted perennial.
Low, 10-15 cm.
Unbranched, all stems arising from a central point,
forming a rosette.



Leaves:

Three-lobed leaves, with rounded tips to lobes.
Leaves about 7.5 cm across, broader than long.
Persistent through winter with a maroonish/brownish color, lying flat on the ground instead of standing up.
Involucral bracts are rounded, looking somewhat like sepals, but distinct from flower.
New leaves appear after flowers.

Flower:

Sepals, the colored parts, vary in number from 6-12, usually 6-7/
Sepals longer than stamens.
White, pink, and lavender flowers borne singly on hairy leafless stems.
Hairs on stems point up (Rickett 1966, p. 126).
A deep purple form, and one with double blue flowers, are known from Oakland County.
Plants with different colors may grow together.
Flowers close at night and on very dark days.
One of earliest spring flowers.

Fruit:

Achene.

Can be confused with: *Hepatica acutiloba* DC., but leaf lobes and involucre of that species are pointed and hairs of stems point backwards. The two species do hybridize to some extent if found in the same area. *H. acutiloba* is reported to be found more frequently in calcareous soils.

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Geographic range:

Type specimen location:

State: Throughout the Lower Peninsula; central and far western portions of the Upper Peninsula.

Regional: Nova Scotia to Manitoba, south to Georgia, Tennessee, Missouri.

Habitat:

Local: North-facing Slope.

Regional: Dry to moist upland woods, usually in drier sites than *H. acutiloba*; often in acid soils and with oak.

Common local companions:

Maples and beech.

Usages:

Human: Native Americans used a tea from the roots and/or leaves for vertigo, convulsions (particularly for children) dysentery, amenorrhea, coughs, and as an astringent. They also prepared a dye from it. The Canadian Pharmacy Journal in 1868 listed *Hepatica triloba* amongst Canadian medicinal plants, and in 1883 reported large quantities being shipped to the U.S. for use in patent medicines, especially for the kidneys. *H. triloba* was the old binomial for *H. americana*, but it is possible they are referring to *H. acutiloba*.

Other animal: The plant depends on bees and flies for pollination.

Why is it called *that*? According to the “doctrine of signatures”, which originated in China, this plant was named for the liver, *hepaticus* in Greek because of its lobed leaf. *Americana* refers to it as an American species, as opposed to *Hepatica nobilis* of Europe.