

## VNPS Piedmont Chapter WILDFLOWER of the WEEK

### WILDFLOWER #98 answer: ROUND-LOBED HEPATICA (*Hepatica americana*)

This dainty early spring ephemeral has no true stems, but sits tight on the ground, a spot of deep green leaves and pale flowers against the brown forest floor. Its name alludes to a fancied resemblance between the three-parted leaf and the three lobes of a human liver. Taking this as a divine sign, European settlers drank hepatica tea for liver ailments. They called hepatica liverleaf and liverwort.

Thick and leathery, hepatica's mottled leaves arise directly from the rhizome. In the fall, they blush a liver-like maroon. Toxic to predators, insulated by dense hairs, they photosynthesize all winter, gaining a head start over other spring ephemerals. Once they start to flower, old leaves wither and new green leaves expand. *H. acutiloba*, which has sharp lobes not rounded, shares this strategy.

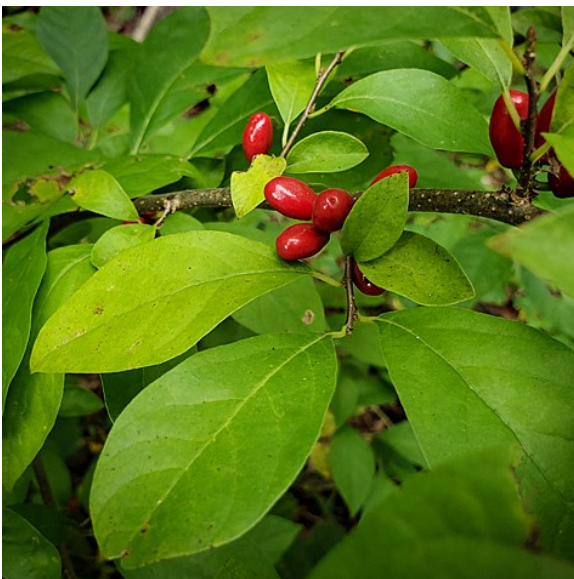
As with its fellows in the buttercup family, this flower's parts come in multiples: numerous separate ovaries, surrounded by many stamens and 5 to 12 white, blue, or pink sepals, which pass for petals. A whorl of three softly hairy bracts cups the flower on its long-haired petiole.

Though the flower has a slight fragrance, it makes no nectar. It blooms too early for most insects, and it shuts on cloudy days and at night. As you might guess, then, it is mostly self-pollinated, but a solitary bee or a fly might carry pollen for a bit of out-crossing.

Chipmunks and other rodents are fond of the hairy pointed fruits (an old name is Squirrel Cup). Ants carry off fruits to eat the elaiosome, a fat-rich appendage. Often discarded seeds germinate in anthills.

### WILDFLOWER #99

**Clues:** This early blooming shrub is deliciously aromatic.



© Ellen M. Falbowski



© Helen Lowe Metznan