

The Reader Rock Garden

www.ReaderRock.com



NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF READER ROCK GARDEN SOCIETY

Reader Rock Ramblings

Spring's Almost Here?

By Diane Dalkin

Burr ... It's going to be a late **Spring** this year with the cold weather lingering longer than we'd like. Yet, planning for the upcoming season needs to be in full gear. Despite still donning our heavy sweaters and winter woollies, Calgarians are usually optimistic souls. So ... Let's stay focused and cheery to welcome the sunshine and warmth *when it finally arrives!*

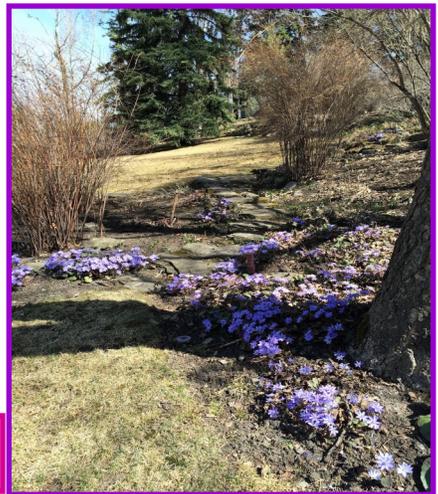
Plan to visit **Reader Rock Garden**. Usually, by the end of March, Hepaticas can be found blooming at the garden (perhaps not this year?). In this issue, our featured plant article will give you more details about this delightful harbinger of Spring. Every month awakens successive growth as Nature gracefully dances through our gardens. This year, we're scheduling to Tweet more regularly to share timely "*What's in Bloom*". Come by the Garden at your convenience, drop by our planned events and check-out our website for what's in-store, like the following:

- ◇ **April 29 & 30** - We'll be at the **Calgary Horticultural Society's Garden Show** at Spruce Meadows. Look for our booth and pop in to say "Hello", support our initiatives and become a member, or simply enter your name for one of the generous draw prizes - like the original art piece donated by the Calgary Sketch Club.
- ◇ **May 27th** - (Saturday) **Annual General Meeting**, held at Reader's Garden Café, lower classroom a.k.a. Potato Room, noon-2:00 pm. Meet the team in-person and find out what we've been up to. All welcomed.
- ◇ **July 29th** - (Saturday) **Annual Garden Stroll**, in conjunction with the *Chinook Country Historical Society*. See www.chinookcountry.org for all the news. Our tour guides will be stationed throughout the Garden to answer questions and provide insights, 1:00-3:00 pm. Lots more planned too!

Besides the above, please note that **Reader's Garden Café** is still in the leasing process, awaiting new management. We will relay all the details to you once they are finalized by the City, *hopefully real soon—fingers crossed!*

It has been said that "*an Optimist is the human personification of spring*", hence ... keep our chins up, spring will eventually get here!

Last year, blue-purple Hepatica dotted the base of many trees at Reader Rock Garden—March 2016



FoRRGS Team

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		Communications - John Percic	Directors - Lindsay Orr, Leah Gayle
		Webmaster - Jacob Gryzenhout	Past President - Ev Keddie

Hepatica - An Iconic Reader Symbol

By Marilyn Mayall

Last year the white hepatica in my garden appeared on March 1st.

With the late freezes of February this year, I'm pretty sure that I won't see such an early appearance of this lovely spring bloom.

But I think that by mid-April I'll be captivated once again by this under-utilized woodland specimen.

Both the common (liverwort or liverleaf) and Latin names (*Hepatica*) derive from the medieval *Doctrine of Signatures* which noted the liver-like shape of the leaves and deduced that this plant must be good for the treatment of ailments of the liver. It may not be toxic in small doses, but it probably won't fix a liver either.

Although some sources suggest that the leaves persist throughout the year, this is not generally the case in Calgary. The first indicators that life is returning to the garden are the single blooms which are borne on pubescent stems and which appear amongst the debris of last season's leaves. A palette of pinks, blues, whites and mauves/purples defines the colour range of the hepatica.

The daisy like bloom is followed by a tidy clump of leaves



Photo: Marilyn Mayall



Photo: Marilyn Mayall

which emerge after flowering and which continue throughout the season ... some changing colour as the season progresses.

Some leaves are variegated, but these plants have not proven to be as vigorous as other hepatica in my garden.

Hepatica clumps spread slowly to a width and height of approximately 15cm. - 20cm.

The deceptively simple looking petals (blunt and

rounded at the tips or longer and rounded at the tips) are not petals at all, but sepals. The individual blooms vary in their number of sepals - between 5 and 12, - but often about 6. Close up, it is the corolla of stamens laden with pollen that give the blooms their star-like quality.

Propagation can be by division of clumps or by seed. Those fortunate enough to have the right conditions note that seedlings appear in their gardens, though the germination rates are far from aggressive. The new seedlings will take a couple of years to bloom and then additional years to reach full blooming capacity. Seeds are difficult to germinate because of their need for cold moist followed by warm moist periods of time. The seed does not remain viable for long and if it is to be stored, requires a cold, moist environment.

Division can be done in Spring or after blooming. Again, patience is required for the new plants to reach their full blooming potential.

Hepatica are amongst the first harbingers of Spring at Reader Rock Garden.

Along with the precocious *Scilla sibirica* and *Puschkinia* which carpet the slopes near the waterfall, clumps of blue hepatica generally appear throughout the gardens in April.



Photo: Karel Bergmann, April 2015

These days, some debate about taxonomy seems to be the norm and hepatica has not escaped classification complications. I spent a happy afternoon going down many rabbit holes which left me totally confused about the correct botanical names (note the plural) for this specimen. But after a good night's sleep I think the following are the important points for me.

Contrary to the norm, where common names are generally unreliable, the common names of round-leaved hepatica and sharp leaved hepatica are descriptive, stable and generally useful for ID purposes.

As an amateur I need to know that this specimen may have many synonyms....mostly depending on factors such as how recently the article was written. Current thinking is that hepatica belongs to the genus *Anemone* and consequently is identified as *Anemone hepatica* with an additional identifying variety (e.g. var *japonica*). However, as this is a relatively recent change I can expect to find some of the older botanical names such as *Hepatica nobilis* or *Hepatica transsilvanica* still in use.

Bringing the varieties of *Hepatica* under the umbrella of *Anemone* underlines the similarities between the European, Asian and North American species as well as establishing the relationship with other members of the *Anemone*

genera ... and an opportunity to introduce some of the established kin in the genus.

Anemone nemorosa is a woodland perennial which spreads by rhizomatous rootstocks.



'Vestal', a white cultivar with a cluster of central staminoides, has palmately lobed leaves, which often become dormant as the season progresses.

Its cultivation requirements are similar to liverwort...well-drained but moist, humus-rich, fertile soil. Part shade is essential as the season progresses but the early light provided by planting under deciduous trees is a plus.



For those seeking a colour outside the pastel range of hepatica, *Anemone ranunculoides* provides a yellow contrast in the Spring garden. Cultivation requirements are so similar to *A. nemorosa* that I will not repeat them here.

For those seeking natives, there is *A. Canadensis* and for those wanting to fill a space with a not-too-fussy specimen there is *A. sylvestris*but do read up a bit on this one ...some gardeners find it has wandering ways.



Photo: Janet Washburn, *A. hupehensis* 'September Charm'

For those seeking a fall blooming anemone, there is the beautiful grape leaf anemone-*A. hupehensis*. This has been blooming for a number of years at Reader on one of the pathways leading up to the Main Lawn area.



For those seeking an out of zone challenge, *A. blanda* may succeed in a sheltered location. It is generally regarded as a Zone 5 specimen. I tried this many years ago, but it did not reappear a second year. Perhaps global warming has taken care of that problem by now and I should try it again.

For those seeking the expensive, rare and exotic, there are some double cultivars. One of these *Hepatica nobilis* 'Rubra Plena' is described as a red hepatica. To my eye, it appears to be a deep pink/magenta rather than red, but its beautifully layered sepals could make an anarchist believe in order.



Photo: Marilyn Mayall

It is rare to find many named cultivars in North America, but in Japan breeding programs have been in existence since the mid-18th century and many named cultivars are available to the connoisseur in Japan...for a generally extravagant price. The Japanese hepaticas featured in catalogues such as Fraser's Thimble Farm on Salt Spring Island are indeed magnificent and attest to the patience that is the hallmark of plant breeders. But as *Hepatica nobilis* var. *japonica* is less hardy than the hepatica we typically grow in Calgary it may be that we should stick to the hepatica which we know will grow here.

Generally not for sale in most nurseries, you are able to obtain hepatica at *Rundlewood Gardens* and at the *CRAGS* plant sale in Spring.

There is some interest in the development of new cultivars in North America. The Northwestern Chapter of NARGS (North American Rock Garden Society) has formed a hepatica study group. A visit to their site (www.nargsnw.org/hepatica-study-group) may be interest to those who would like to know more about recent developments in the field of hepatica cultivation and breeding.

My thanks to Janet Washburn for her suggestions and photo and Karel Bergmann for his photo of Hepatica.



The Scottish Rock Garden Club has stunning Hepatica photos, see their website at: www.srgc.org.uk/wisley/2008/160308/log.html



Photo: Diane Dalkin March 2016



Fun Facts: The hardy jewel-like Hepatica is the inspiration for the FoRRGS' logo/emblem. Also, the Café's business cards have included (since its inception) a charming artistic rendition of *Hepatica nobilis* too.



We need YOU and your talents!

Please consider becoming a **volunteer** with us; our team is looking for all sorts of fun-loving, passionate folks that want to give back to their community, in your own ways. A wide range of tasks and time commitments are available. Tour guides are especially needed. Let's chat soon.

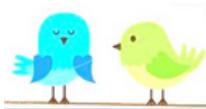
Start the new gardening season off on the right foot; make it memorable... Volunteer!

Give Diane a call at 403-281-5899 or email at info@readerrock.com. Thanks!!



Hope to see you at our upcoming events:

- * April 29th & 30th - CHS Garden Show @ Spruce Meadows. Come visit us at our booth.
- * May 27th (Saturday) - FoRRGS AGM - lower classroom @Reader's Garden Café Noon-2:00 pm
- * July 29th (Saturday)- 1:00-3:00 pm Annual Garden Stroll @ the Garden, in conjunction with the Chinook Country Historical Society



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The **Calgary Rock and Alpine Garden Society (CRAGS)**

Upcoming 2017 Talks & Events:

Please see their website for the schedule
www.crags.ca/events

Lakeview Community Association Hall
6110 - 34 Street SW