

The European liverwort

Hepatica nobilis var. nobilis (Garsault)

In general, among plant lovers "the liverwort" is known, mostly as blue-flowered, some with slightly larger, cupped, but also others with star-shaped flowers. This depends on the number and shape of the petals and the color. The blue can vary, but if you are lucky, you may find one in the forest with pale pink or vivid pink petals, or even a white one, where the differences described above can be just as pronounced. Thus, a collector with a keen eye for the subtle differences in shape and color of the flowers can already assemble a diverse, delightful *Hepatica* collection. It is very popular - but, unfortunately, not allowed to take them from the forest. Some gardeners are just beginning to specialize in *Hepatica* again. Therefore, it is better to use such sources, especially since it is not at all easy to settle this genus in the garden in the long run, to cultivate it well and to propagate it. It takes time(!), work and knowledge. It is not for nothing that the liverwort, which was very common in the Biedermeier era, has almost completely disappeared from nurseries and gardens. Time has probably become too fast-moving. It is necessary to encourage the gardeners!

And then there are the exceptionally popular with most people double and double *Hepatica nobilis*, supposedly in all colors of liverworts, but you have to look for them very, very much. They are correspondingly expensive. The most expensive is the real European white liverwort. Also the Japanese have such forms, beautiful and wickedly expensive, but wise to cultivate with us probably in the cold or alpine house: not all Japanese are supposed to be winter-hardy.

But the diversity of *Hepatica nobilis var. nobilis* is by no means evident only in the flowers. The whole shape and especially the leaves are also involved. This is hardly surprising, considering the wide distribution of this humble forest ground herb in Europe. It is true that they can be recognized everywhere as liverworts, and over long distances they are really very similar, but here and there special forms have emerged which have emphasized some characteristic inherent in the genus and have preferred to adorn themselves with it. There is, for example, on the southern side of the Pyrenees, a small, lowly form with roundish, small leaves, of a very peculiar mossy green, often with a bright white pattern, a tiny coveted preciousness, whose soft blue flowers are usually edged with white. In the Dolomites there is almost the opposite form with a completely different shape. The leaves are gray-green, often patterned silver-white, or tinged brown-red, on 25 cm long, thin, bending stems that are wiry and hard. Leaf blades are also hard, large, and with wavy surfaces. The plants grow slowly, from single, very thick shoot buds. Their blue can be very intense purple. There are also purple and white flowers, which are generally large and cupped, which is especially with the white looks very noble. The



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flower stems are very long, as are the leaf stems, so they would be good for cutting. There is also a northern form that has even been named, *Hepatica nobilis* var. *glabrata*. It gives the impression of being limited to the bare essentials, drab grass-green, leaves small, smooth, flat and strictly tripartite with smooth margins, flowers white and small, shape rather small. It is found on Oeland in Sweden and is more of a collector's plant to own for completeness. One could also give names to the first two, the collector often calls it *Hepatica nobilis pyrenaica*, which is not "official", and the dolomite group has the garden name "Eisachtaler" with some identifying addition.

Of course, there are probably many more forms, you just have to find them or breed them, because they are probably all among themselves cross bar.

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