

A liverleaf's tale continued...

Do you remember me? I do not want to boast but I am quite special. My name is 'Blaues Wunder' (Blue Wonder), or to use my full and correct name: *Hepatica nobilis* var. *nobilis* 'Blaues Wunder'.

I am an exceptionally beautiful cultivar, selected from the North European endemic liverleaf species. As evidenced by my three-lobed leaves, I belong to the Triloba series. Completely different from the species of the Angulosa series, which are characterized by their larger, five-lobed leaves and especially by their horizontally growing buds.

The Romanian side of my family, from the Angulosa series (*Hepatica transsilvanica*), keep themselves a bit away from us, that is why they look so different. Big, stately, growing just as well in dryer soils...Oh, I am getting ecstatic.

During the last couple of years, I attended a lot of our "family reunions", that is how I came to know there are a lot of different forms and geographical varieties in our family. There are those with wonderfully marbled leaves, for example. A characteristic most often seen in our relatives from the Pyrenees. And one of my aunts (*Hepatica nobilis* var. *glabrata*) from Scandinavia has no red pigments at all, that makes her a true albino in green. If I wanted to meet even more special relatives, I should travel a bit further. My parents maintain a lively correspondence with America, where a few relatives are living (*Hepatica nobilis* var. *acuta* and *Hepatica nobilis* var. *obtusa*). It is said they have a lot more hair on their flower- and leafstalks. It seems the leaf cover through which they have to come up in spring is a lot thicker there, so the hairs help the leaves to push through.

Excitingly, we also got a message from an uncle in Korea. He told of a giant in his family, who lives solely on an island (*Hepatica maxima*). As tall as 25 centimetres and with its unusually large leaves and seed heads, it is a very remarkable species. In Korea you can also find the elegant *Hepatica nobilis* var. *insularis*. The leaves with their incredibly beautiful patterns, that die down in winter, are worth being highlighted here.

While we are on the topic of my Asian relatives, there is also our small Chinese grandmother (*Hepatica henryi*). She appears to be closer related to our Romanian cousins, since her small leaves are also five-lobed. This lady is very elegant. On a well-known mountain another of the Angulosa series is growing (*Hepatica yamatutai*). This one is a lot bigger, with very hairy leaves and the underside of the leaves are crimson coloured.

Ever since my childhood, I was told the story of a lost relative. And now he was rediscovered in Central-Asia. *Hepatica falconeri* belongs to the five-lobed species but is often considered to be the archetype of *Hepatica*.



H. transsilvanica



H. nobilis Marmorata



H. nobilis var. *glabrata*



H. nobilis var. *acuta*



H. nobilis var. *insularis*

Actually, I think he has little in common with us - very deeply divided leaves and very elegant flowers. I hope he does not think himself superior...

But we are the proudest of our Japanese connections. In that country the Hepatica's have been held in high esteem since the first century CE. There are even cities that carry this flower in their coat of arms. The colours and forms of those family-members are a lot more variable than those of the species in our native woods. Enough so to make me a bit jealous. But on the other side I have been told that a lot of these Asian species are not strong enough to withstand our winters. They are just not used to our muddy/wet winters.

Oh well, that just means they must get the best place in the garden. We, the locals, are not so demanding. It would be even better if we could combine our best characteristics. Just like in nature, where the strongest reproduce and where new adaptations help our survival. But, to that end, we need help since we are too far apart for the bees or the wind to help us. That is why I talked to some gardeners...

And for sure, the first attempts were made decades ago by a Swedish person. In Germany, the first crosses were made between *Hepatica nobilis* var. *pubescens* and *Hepatica transsilvanica*. The wonderful children from that cross are often grouped as *Hepatica x euroasiatica*. Bi-coloured flowers, quick to increase and just as strong as my indigenous sisters and brothers.

When *Hepatica transsilvanica* is used as one of the parents, the progeny is very vigorous and garden worthy, so it is clear that is the future. The focus of my breeder for example is the hybridisation of *Hepatica transsilvanica* with the wonderful Japanese forms and colours (*Hepatica x trans-japonica*). Not because we, as indigenous plants, are not beautiful, but you should have seen the corner with the young people at our last family reunion. Big, good looking forms with bright pink or dark blue flowers. With healthy leaves and they withstand our Northern German weather perfectly. I look forward to the next reunion, to see if the family will have grown some more...

I hope to have sparked your interest in me and my extensive family. When you are in the neighbourhood, please visit us in our Hepatica-garden in the real North.

You're welcome, your liverleaf: **'Blaues Wunder'**



H. yamatutai



H. henryi



H. maxima buds



H. x euroasiatica



H. x trans-japonica