

## **“Spring Beauty” and Hepatica**

by Sally Cureton

Spring, in the woods of Virginia, is often heralded by the arrival of a little pink flower called appropriately enough “Spring Beauty” (*Claytonia virginica*). A native perennial this dainty little plant grows close to the ground at 6 to 12 inches height. Its leaves are long and slender about 3-6 inches. The flower itself is only about ¼ inch across with 5 petals which are actually white with fine pink stripes. On warm sunny days they open up wide and close up in the evening or during cloudy weather.

Spring Beauties thrive in dappled sunlight with moist to slightly dry soils. Therefore, it can be found in meadows, stream banks or in the woods. The plants form large colonies by spreading underground. They do this with bulblike swellings just above the roots called corms. These look like small new potatoes and taste like sweet chestnuts. Native Americans and colonists used these corms as food. A similar species, the Carolina Spring Beauty has broader leaves, but the same sweet flower.

Another early plant to be found in the Rockingham Springs Arboretum is the hepatica (*Anemone Americana*). Another low plant, it has round-lobed leaves about 2 inches long and hairy stalks. The ½ - 1 inch flower will be pinkish, lavender-blue or white. It grows to a height of 4-6 inches and blooms from March to June. The name hepatica comes from the Latin word meaning liver which its 3 lobed leaves are supposed to resemble. This led some early people to use the plants to treat liver ailments.

Charming hepatica can be found in deeply shaded woods or in meadows in full sun. It is frequently found near limestone and will grow in either sandy or clay soils. The only conditions it seems to require are a moist soil and a winter snowfall. Obviously a hardy plant, it is also quite lovely. If you have time later on this month, stop by the Arboretum, take a walk and look for these flowers. You won't be disappointed.