

The Writings of Eloise Butler



Anemones, Hepaticas and Buttercups Prominent in Crowfoot Family Here - April 30, 1911

A number of the early flowering plants are members of the crowfoot family (Ref. #1) [such] as the anemones and buttercups. In the divided leaves of a crowfoot, as some of the buttercups are called, the early botanists saw a resemblance to a bird's foot.

The buttercups of Minnesota are not so much in evidence as the tall European [Tall] Buttercup [*Ranunculus acris*] the pest of the hay fields - farther east.



Littleleaf Buttercup,
Ranunculus abortivus

One early species, *Ranunculus abortivus*, [Littleleaf (or Kidneyleaf) Buttercup] has so small a flower that a novice would scarcely notice it, and is surprised to hear it named a buttercup. Neither would a child be likely to apply the time-worn test of holding the flower to your face to learn if you love butter.

This lowly buttercup [her text omits the common name] blooms sparsely on the prairie with the pasque flower. The specific name *rhomboides* [prairie buttercup] indicates the shape of the leaf.

is not conspicuously massed.

Our two prettiest buttercups are aquatics - one with shining, yellow petals; the other with smaller white flowers and long, railing stems; and both bearing finely dissected leaves.

The large Crowfoot family is without strongly marked characters. Its plants have usually an acrid taste; the leaves are generally more or less cut or divided; the corolla is often wanting, and, when this is the case, the calyx is colored like a corolla; the stamens are numerous; the pistils vary in number from one to several; and all the parts of the flower are distinct or unconnected.

All these points may be verified in the hepatica, or liverleaf, now in bloom along the river banks. It seems somewhat incongruous to associate a name so musical and a flower so beautiful with anything so prosaic as the liver. Yet hepatica is "liver" in Greek, and some herbalist, long ago, made the comparison, when he saw the three-lobed leaf. The leaves endure through



Tall Buttercup,
Ranunculus acris



Early Buttercup, *Ranunculus fascicularis*. Photo ©Merle R. Black, Wisconsin Flora.



Prairie Buttercup,
Ranunculus rhomboideus.
Photo ©Derek Anderson,
Wisconsin Flora.

the winter and their rich tints of bonze and purple garnish the tuft of lovely flowers varying through all shades of blue and lilac to white.

The lighter tones are found in the older and more exposed flowers. Just under the flower, and separated from it by a very short stem, are three green leaves or bracts, as leaves on flower stems are technically named - which exactly imitate a calyx, thus fooling the unwary. When the flowers go to seed, new leaves appear. Several plants get their flower work done early, before they are shaded by the leaves, which unfold later to prepare the food for the next year's flowers and seeds.

The hepatica is closely allied to the anemones. Two species are found in Minnesota - one with sharp-lobed and one with round-lobed leaves (Ref. #2). The sharp-lobed species only, is indigenous to Minneapolis; but both have been planted in the wild garden in Glenwood Park.



Notes:

1. Crowfoot Family, (Ranunculaceae) -in current times this family is now called the Buttercup Family
2. Sharp-lobed Hepatica is now classified as *Anemone acutiloba* and Round-lobed is classified as *Anemone americana*.

The text of this article, along with a large photo of the Hepatica (by Mary Meeker) was published on Sunday April 30, 1911 in the *Sunday Minneapolis Tribune*. It was one of a series of weekly articles Eloise Butler published in 1911 to help acquaint the public with her newly established Wild Botanic Garden in Glenwood Park Some of the plants she discusses are extant in the Garden today. In brackets within the text, and in the notes, have been added the necessary common name or scientific name, that she did not list in her article. Nomenclature is based on the latest published information from *Flora of North America* and the *Checklist of the Vascular Flora of Minnesota*.

Photo of Eloise Butler, ca. 1920, at top of page courtesy Minneapolis Public Library. Other photos ©G D Bebeau or as credited.

The Wild Botanic Garden in Glenwood Park, became the "Native Plant Reserve" and was then renamed the Eloise Butler Wild Flower Garden in 1929.