

Species Spotlight

Harbinger of Spring (*Erigenia bulbosa*)



Harbinger of Spring (*Erigenia bulbosa*) is one of the earliest blooming wildflowers in Ohio, often appearing in mid- to late-February. Another common name for this plant is "pepper and salt," an apt name as it reflects the flowers' contrasting dark anthers (pepper) and white petals (salt). Underground corms with fibrous roots store energy until late winter's dappled sunlight hits the forest floor, prompting the plant to start growing.

Harbinger of spring is a member of the *Apiaceae* family, as are carrots, parsley, hogweed, poison hemlock, and Queen Anne's lace; you may notice the likeness when comparing the lacy-looking leaves. Pepper and Salt's stout stems range in color from light green to reddish-brown and can grow up to a foot long, trailing under leaf litter, before flower buds appear just a few inches above ground.

The small flowers, each having five petals, appear in clusters called umbels at the end of the stem. A closer look at the flower structure reveals one to five flowers per cluster. When the oval petals first open, the the anthers may appear reddish in color but they turn black as the flower matures. The blooming period lasts around one month.

The nectar from the flowers attracts a variety of early pollinators like native bees and flies. Once pollinated, the flower produces a single seed per flower which naturally drops to the ground and helps the colony to spread.

Look for it Now in Southwest Ohio

Harbinger of Spring can often be found in deciduous forests, popping up in loamy soils covered with a layer of nutrient-rich leaf litter.

Within the Warren County Park District, we have seen this plant growing at Landen Deerfield, Hisey, Armco, and Gully Parks.

We have also seen it our own yards, so help usher in spring by having a look around your own community!

Text by Shannon Pennington
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