

HARBINGER OF SPRING

BY TERRY BONACE, ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION GROUP



So beloved is this tiny flower that the Illinois Native Plant Society named its botanical journal (*Erigenia*) after it. But it is not beloved for its beauty. Indeed it is one of the plainest flowers of our spring flora. Harbinger of spring's (*Erigenia bulbosa*) claim to fame is its early blooming period, giving hope that spring is coming. Officially it is known to bloom as early as March 17 in our area but I have heard reports of blooms as early as January.

When harbinger of spring blooms, the flowering stems reach a height of only 2 to 3 inches. The flowers appear in little umbels (an umbrella-like arrangement) with up to 6 flowers per umbel. The petals (5 per flower) are about 1/4 inch in length each. The anthers of the flowers are dark red when they first appear but eventually turn nearly black. The contrast between the white petals and the black anthers give this plant its other common name, "pepper and salt."

The leaves are divided into many tiny leaflets, resembling a fern frond. Though the plant can reach a height of 10 inches, mostly these taller stems will sprawl along the ground

Near Beverly Shores, the best place to find this plant is along Trail 2 in the Indiana Dunes State Park or in the Heron Rookery. Look carefully as it is very easy to overlook. And often it is growing right along the trail's edge! If anyone sees harbinger of spring growing within Beverly Shores, I would be very interested in hearing about it.

The Environmental Restoration Group (ERG) will be glad to help identify plants for you and make suggestions for removal of invasives and for native replacements. Don't hesitate to contact Terry Bonace (tbonace@gmail.com) or Candice Smith (candicepetersonsmith@gmail.com) for assistance. Also please visit our website at www.bserg.org for further information on native and non-native plants.
