

Chickweed Herb Profile

Also known as

Stellaria media, and Stellaria spp, Mouse-ear, Adder's Mouth, Tongue Grass, Alsine, Chick Wittles, Satinflower, Winter Weed, and Star Weed.

Introduction

Chickweed is an English herb easily recognized by its straggling, succulent stems bearing paired leaves and white star shaped flowers. It is said that there is no part of the world where chickweed doesn't grow; it is even found in the North Arctic regions. Both the Chippewa and Iroquois tribes used chickweed as a soothing eyewash and wound poultice. The herbalist Nicholas Culpepper recommended it as a main ingredient in a healing ointment. Modern uses include it in a variety of salves and ointments to help with all types of skin conditions including psoriasis, eczema, and even minor burns.

Constituents

Coumarins, rutin, B vitamins, iron, saponins, thiamine, niacin, vitamin C

Parts Used

Entire aerial part of plant.

Typical Preparations

Most often used as a tincture or ointment. Can be encapsulated or taken as a tea. For external applications it may be used in salves, infused in oil, or ointments.

Summary

Chickweed is a "drawing herb" once thought to remove toxins from the skin, now more typically explained as a microcirculatory stimulant for the skin. Chickweed may be employed to treat acne, abscesses of the skin, and eczema, as well as duodenal and peptic ulcers. It can also be added to a bath to reduce inflammation and encourage tissue repair.

Precautions

Excessive doses have in rare occasions induced vomiting and/or diarrhea.

Botanical: *Stellaria media* (CYRILL.)

Family: N.O. Caryophyllaceae

- [Description](#)
- [Part Used Medicinally](#)
- [Medicinal Action and Uses](#)

---Synonyms---Starweed. Star Chickweed. *Alsine media* (Linn.). *Passerina* (French) Stellaire.

(German) Augentrosgräs.

---Part Used---Herb.

---Habitat---It has been said that there is no part of the world where the Chickweed is not to be found. It is a native of all temperate and north Arctic regions, and has naturalized itself wherever the white man has settled, becoming one of the commonest weeds.

From the Groundsel, we naturally from association of ideas turn to the Chickweed, though it is in no way *botanically* allied to the Groundsel.

Several plants have been named Chickweed, one of them a plant belonging to the Purslane family and four species of *Cerastium* - the Mouse Ear Chickweeds - but the name especially belongs to the plant in question, *Stellaria media*, the ubiquitous garden weed, of which our caged birds are as fond as they are of Groundsel, a taste shared by young chickens, to whose diet it makes a wholesome addition.

Chickweed is a most variable plant. Gerard enumerates no less than thirteen species, but the various forms are nowadays merely considered deviations from the one type. Hooker gives three varieties which have been named by other botanists as separate species.

---Description---The stem is procumbent and weak, much branched, often reaching a considerable length, trailing on the ground, juicy, pale green and slightly swollen at the joints. Chickweed is readily distinguished from the plants of the same genus by the line of hairs that runs up the stem on one side only, which when it reaches a pair of leaves is continued on the opposite side. The leaves are succulent, egg-shaped, about 1/2 inch long and 1/4 inch broad, with a short point, pale green and quite smooth, with flat stalks below, but stalkless above. They are placed on the stem in pairs. The small white star-like flowers are situated singly in the axils of the upper leaves. Their petals are narrow and deeply cleft, not longer than the sepals. They open about nine o'clock in the morning and are said to remain open just twelve hours in bright weather, but rain prevents them expanding, and after a heavy shower they become pendent instead of having their faces turned up towards the sun, though in the course of a few days rise again. The flowers are already in bloom in March and continue till late in the autumn. The seeds are contained in a little capsule fitted with teeth which close up in wet weather, but when ripe are open and the seeds are shaken out by each movement of the plant in the breeze this being one of the examples of the agency of the wind in the dispersal of seeds, which is to be seen in similar form in the capsules of poppy, henbane, campion and many other common plants.

The Chickweed is also an instance of what is termed the 'Sleep of Plants,' for every night the leaves approach each other, so that their upper surfaces fold over the tender buds of the new shoots, and the uppermost pair but one of the leaves at the end of the stalk are furnished with longer leafstalks than the others, so that they can close upon the terminating pair and protect the tip of the shoot.

The young leaves when boiled can hardly be distinguished from spring spinach, and are equally wholesome. They may also be used uncooked with young Dandelion leaves to form a salad.

The custom of giving Chickweed to birds is a very old one, for Gerard tells us:

'Little birds in cades (especially Linnets) are refreshed with the lesser Chickweed when they loath their meat whereupon it was called of some "Passerina." '

Both wild and caged birds eat the seeds as well as the young tops and leaves. Pigs like Chickweed, and also rabbits; cows and horses will eat it; sheep are indifferent to it, but goats refuse to touch it.

[\[Top\]](#)

---Part Used Medicinally---The whole herb, collected between May and July, when it is in the best condition, and dried in the same manner as Groundsel. It is used both fresh and dried.

---Medicinal Action and Uses---Demulcent, refrigerant. It is held in great repute amongherbalists, used mostly in the form of an ointment.

The fresh leaves have been employed as a poultice for inflammation and indolent ulcers with most beneficial results. A poultice of Chickweed enclosed in muslin is a sure remedy for a carbuncle or an external abscess. The water in which the Chickweed is boiled should also be used to bathe the affected part.

Gerard tells us that:

'the leaves of Chickweed boyled in water very soft, adding thereto some hog's grease, the powder of Fenugreeke and Linseed, and a few roots of Marsh Mallows, and stamped to the forme of Cataplasme or pultesse, taketh away the swelling of the legs or any other part . . . in a word it comforteth, digesteth, defendeth and suppurateth very notably.'

He says that 'the leaves boyled in vinegar and salt are good against mangines of the hands and legs, if they be bathed therewith.'

Combined with Elecampane, Chickweed has also been recommended as a specific for hydrophobia, and the juice, taken internally, for scurvy.

The plant chopped and boiled in lard makes a fine green cooling ointment, good for piles and sores, and cutaneous diseases. It has also been employed as an application for ophthalmia.

A decoction made with the fresh plant is good for constipation, and an infusion of the dried herb is efficacious in coughs and hoarseness. The dose of the fluid extract is 10 to 60 drops.

Culpepper calls it 'a fine, soft, pleasing herb, under the dominion of the Moon,' and goes on to tell us that:

'It is found to be as effectual as Purslain to all the purposes whereunto it serveth, except for meat only. The herb bruised, or the juice applied, with cloths or sponges dipped therein to the region of the liver, and as they dry to have fresh applied, doth wonderfully temper the heat of the liver and is effectual for all impostumes and swellings whatsoever; for all redness in the face, wheals, pushes, itch or scabs, the juice being either simply used, or boiled in hog's grease; the juice or distilled water is of good use for all heat and redness in the eyes ... as also into the ears.... It helpeth the sinews when they are shrunk by cramps or otherwise, and extends and makes them pliable again, by using the following methods, viz.: Boil a handful of Chickweed and a handful of dried red-rose leaves, but not distilled, in a quart of muscadine, until a fourth part be consumed; then put to them a pint of oil of trotters, or sheep's feet, let them boil a good while, still stirring them well, which being strained, anoint the grieved part therewith warm against the fire, rubbing it well with your hand, and bind also some of the herb, if you choose, to the place, and with God's

blessing it will help in three times dressing.'

Chickweed water is an old wives' remedy for obesity.