

Cleavers and Powder Profile

Also known as

Galium aparine, clivers, goosegrass. Barweed, Bedstraw, Catchweed, Cleaverwort, Coachweed, Eriffe, Everlasting Friendship, Galium aparine, Goosebill, Gosling Weed, Grip Grass, Hayriff, Hayruff, Hedge-Burs, Hedgeheriff, Love-Man, Mutton Chops, Robin-Run-in-the-Grass, Scratchweed, Stick-a-Back, Sweethearts.

Introduction

Cleavers is a pasture plant of Britain and North America easily recognized by its clinging leaves and sticky seeds attaching themselves to any animal or person passing them. The entire plant is used in herbal medicine, harvested just before it blooms in early summer. Cleavers is related to both quinine and sweet woodruff. It has no odor, and a slightly bitter taste. Native American tribes used it as a bath herb for women so that they would be successful in love; also as a hair tonic to make hair grow. According to French research in 1947, it is said to be good for lowering blood pressure.

Constituents

Chlorophyll, citric acid, rubichloric acid, tannins.

Parts Used

Usually the above ground parts of the plant, dried and chopped.

Typical Preparations

Usually taken as a tea, but can be eaten or ground fresh. Equally as suitable as an extract or capsule and may be lightly sprinkled on food as it has a fresh taste.

Summary

Cleavers is a diuretic herb, the "Lasix" (furosemide) of the nineteenth century, used to assist ailing hearts by encouraging urination to reduce the volume of blood to relieve congestive heart failure. Herbalists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reported that it dissolved kidney stones; however, neither cleavers nor any other diuretic should be used during an acute attack. Cleavers were also used in washes and cosmetics to remove freckles as well as for skin problems such as eczema and psoriasis.

Precautions

None.

Botanical: Galium aparine (LINN.)

Family: N.O. Rubiaceae

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

---**Synonyms**---Cleavers. Goosegrass. Barweed. Hedgeheriff. Hayriffe. Eriffe. Grip Grass. Hayruff. Catchweed. Scratweed. Mutton Chops. Robin-run-in-the-Grass. Loveman. Goosebill. Everlasting Friendship.

---**Part Used**---Herb.

---**Habitat**---It is abundant as a hedgerow weed, not only throughout Europe, but also in North America, springing up luxuriantly about fields and waste places.

The natural order Rubiaceae, to which the Madder (*Rubia tinctoria*) and our common wild plants, the Clivers, the Bedstraws and Sweet Woodruff belong, comprises upwards of 3,000 species. Many of these are of the highest utility to man, both as food and medicine, among the former the coffee-tree, *Coffea Arabica*, is perhaps of the first importance. The valuable drug quinine is furnished by several species of *Cinchona*, a South American genus, and drugs of similar properties are derived from other plants of the same tribe, while Ipecacuanha is the powdered root of another member of this order, growing in the forests of Brazil. Many species growing in tropical climates are moreover noted for the beauty and fragrance of their flowers.

Our British representatives are of a very different character, being all herbaceous plants, with slender, angular stems, bearing leaves arranged in whorls, or rosettes and small flowers. From the star-like arrangement of their leaves, all these British species have been assigned to the tribe *Stellatae* of the main order Rubiaceae. All the members of this tribe, numbering about 300, grow in the cold and temperate regions of the Northern Hemisphere.

Of the fifteen British representatives of the tribe *Stellatae*, eleven bear the name of Galium (the genus of the Bedstraws), and perhaps the commonest of these is the annual herb *Galium aparine*, familiarly known as Clivers or Goosegrass, though it rejoices in many other popular names in different parts of the country.

The angles of its quadrangular stalks and leaves are covered with little hooked bristles, which attach themselves to passing objects, and by which it fastens itself in a ladder-like manner to adjacent shrubs, so as to push its way upwards through the dense vegetation of the hedgerows into daylight, its rough, weak stems then struggling over and through all the other wayside plants, often forming matted masses.

The narrow, lance-shaped *leaves* (Professor Henslow explains that though the *Galiums* look as if they possessed whorls of six *leaves*, in reality each whorl consists of only *two* real leaves, one of which may usually be recognized by having a bud or shoot arising from its *axil*, the other four are *stipules*, two belonging to each leaf. - Editor.) - about 1/2 inch long and 1/4 inch broad - are arranged in *rosettes or whorls, six or eight together*, and are rough all over both margins and surface, the prickles pointing backwards. The flowers two or three together, spring from the axils of the leaves and are small and star-

like, either white or greenish-white. They are followed by little globular seed-vessels, about 8 inch in diameter, covered with hooked bristles and readily adhering, like the leaves, to whatever they touch. By clinging to the coat of any animal that touches them, the dispersal of the seeds is ensured.

Most of the plant's popular names are connected with the clinging nature of the herb. Some of its local names are of very old origin, being derived from the Anglo-Saxon 'hedge rife,' meaning a taxgatherer or robber, from its habit of plucking the sheep as they pass near a hedge. The old Greeks gave it the name *Philanthropon*, from its habit of clinging. The specific name of the plant, *aparine*, also refers to this habit, being derived from the Greek *aparo* (to seize). Clite, Click, Clitheren, Clithers are no doubt various forms of Cleavers, and Loveman is merely an Anglicized version of *Philanthropon*. Its frequent name, Goosegrass, is a reference to the fact that geese are extremely fond of the herb. It is often collected for the purpose of giving it to poultry. Horses, cows and sheep will also eat it with relish.

The seeds of Clivers form one of the best substitutes for coffee; they require simply to be dried and slightly roasted over a fire, and so prepared, have much the flavour of coffee. They have been so used in Sweden. The whole plant gives a decoction equal to tea.

We learn from Dioscorides that the Greek shepherds of his day employed the stems of this herb to make a rough sieve, and it is rather remarkable that Linnaeus reported the same use being made of it in Sweden, in country districts, as a filter to strain milk; the stalks are still used thus in Sweden.

The plant is inodorous, but has a bitterish and somewhat astringent taste.

The roots will dye red, and if eaten by birds will tinge their bones.

[\[Top\]](#)

---Part Used Medicinally---The whole plant root excepted, gathered in May and June, when just coming into flower.

---Chemical Constituents---Chlorophyll, starch and three distinct acids, viz. a variety of tannic acid, which has been named galitannic acid, citric acid and a peculiar acid named rubichloric acid.

---Medicinal Action and Uses---Diuretic, tonic, alterative, aperient.

In old Herbals it is extolled for its powers, and it is still employed in country districts, both in England and elsewhere, as a purifier of the blood, the tops being used as an ingredient in rural 'spring drinks.'

Fluid extract: dose, 1/2 to 1 drachm.

Modern herbalists and homoeopaths still recognize the value of this herb, and as an alterative consider it may be given to advantage in scurvy, scrofula, psoriasis and skin diseases and eruptions generally. The expressed juice is recommended, in doses of 3 oz. twice a day, but as it is a rather powerful diuretic, care should be taken that it is not given where a tendency to diabetes is manifested. Its use, however, is recommended in dropsical complaints, as it operates with considerable power upon the urinary secretion and the urinary organs. It is given in obstructions of these organs, acting as a solvent of stone in the bladder.

The dried plant is often infused in hot water and drunk as a tea, 1 OZ. of the dried herb being infused to 1 pint of water. This infusion, either hot or cold, is taken frequently in wine-glassful doses.

The same infusion has a most soothing effect in cases of insomnia, and induces quiet, restful sleep.

A wash made from Clivers is said to be useful for sunburn and freckles, a decoction or infusion of the fresh herb being used for this purpose, applied to the face by means of a soft cloth or sponge.

The herb has a special curative reputation with reference to cancerous growths and allied tumours, an ointment being made from the leaves and stems wherewith to dress the ulcerated parts, the expressed juice at the same time being used internally.

Clivers was also used as an ointment for scalds and burns in the fourteenth century, under the name of Heyryt, Cosgres, Clive and Tongbledes (Tonguebleed), the latter doubtless from its roughness due to the incurved hooks all over the plant.

It was later used for colds, swellings, etc., the whole plant being rather astringent, and on account of this property being of service in some bleedings, as well as in diarrhoea. Clivers tea is still a rural remedy for colds in the head.

The crushed herb is applied in France as a poultice to sores and blisters.

Gerard writes of Clivers as a marvellous remedy for the bites of snakes, spiders and all venomous creatures, and quoting Pliny, says: 'A pottage made of Cleavers, a little mutton and oatmeal is good to cause lankness and keepe from fatnesse.'

Culpepper recommends Clivers for earache.