

# Self Heal-Heal All Profile

## Also known as

prunella vulgaris, Heal All, Prunella, Woundwort, Hercules Woundwort, Sickle Herb, Carpenter's Herb, Dragonhead, and Blue Curls

## Introduction

Heal all is a common weed that grows wild throughout North America, Europe and temperate areas in Asia. A low-growing perennial with purple flowers, Heal All has been used in traditional medicine to treat a wide variety of ills and wounds, including cuts, abrasions, bruises, sore throats, thrush, yeast infections and liver ailments. More recently, heal all has been used in combination with bugleweed to treat Graves disease, a disorder of the thyroid. While heal all may seem to enjoy the reputation of panacea, there are some medicinal uses that have been consistent throughout the world, and which are being borne out by modern research.

## Constituents

Betulinic-acid, D-Camphor, Delphinidin, Hyperoside, Manganese, Oleanolic-acid, Rosmarinic-acid, Rutin, Ursolic-acid, and Tannins

## Parts Used

leaves and flowers

## Typical Preparations

The leaves of heal all are edible and are often used in soups and salads. Dried, they are used with other herbs in making tea. Even a weak infusion of self heal has enough antibiotic and antiseptic effect to be an effective treatment for conjunctivitis and sties. Also found encapsulated and as an extract.

## Summary

There is a German saying, "He needs neither physician nor surgeon who has self heal to help himself?", and that sentiment seems to be confirmed as modern medicine studies one of the most commonly used healing herbs in the world. Chemical analyses have shown that heal all has antibiotic and antiseptic properties that are effective against herpes and e. coli, among others. It is astringent, and helps slow and stop bleeding both internally and externally. It has shown promise in treating AIDS and tuberculosis and some forms of cancer.

## Precautions

Currently, there are no known harmful side effects to the use of heal all.

**Botanical: *Prunella vulgaris* (LINN.)**

**Family: N.O. Labiatae**

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**---Synonyms---**Prunella. All-Heal. Hook-Heal. Slough-Heal. Brunella. Heart of the Earth. Blue Curls.

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

**---Habitat---**Common throughout the British Isles and Europe.

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The Self-Heal holds an equal place with Bugle in the esteem of herbalists.

**---Description---**It may at once be distinguished from other members of the great Labiate order because on the top of its flowering stalks, the flowers - to quote Culpepper - are 'thicke set together like an eare or spiky knap.' No other plant is at all like it. Immediately below this ear are a pair of stalkless leaves standing out on either side like a collar. The flowers and bracts of this spike or 'ear' are arranged in most regular tiers or whorls, each tier composed of a ring of six stalkless flowers, supported by a couple of spreading, sharp-pointed bracts. The number of whorls varies from half a dozen to a dozen. The flower-spike is at first very short, compact and cylindrical, but then opens out somewhat, maintaining much the same size throughout its length, not tapering as in the flower spikes of most other flowers. The flowers do not come out simultaneously in any one ring, so that a somewhat ragged-looking head of flowers is produced.

Each flower consists of a two-lipped calyx, the upper lip very wide and flat, edged with three blunt teeth, the lower lip much narrower and with two long, pointed teeth. Both lips have red margins and carry hairs. The two-lipped corolla is of a deep purple hue, the upper lip strongly arched, on the top of the arch many hairs standing on end, and the lower lip of much the same length, spreading out into three holes. Under the roofing upper lip are two pairs of stamens, one pair longer than the other, their filaments ending in two little branches, one of which carries an anther, the other remaining a little spike. Through the centre of the two pairs of stamens the long style runs, curving so as to fit under the lip, its lower end set between four nutlets. Honey lies at the bottom of the corolla tube, protected from tiny insects by a thick hedge of hairs placed just above it. The flower is adapted by this formation, like the rest of the Labiate group, for fertilization by bees, who alight on the lower lip and in thrusting their probosces down the tube for the honey, dust their heads with the pollen from the anthers and then on visiting the next flower, smear this pollen on the end of the curving style that runs up the arch of the upper lip and thus effect fertilization. After fertilization is effected, the corolla falls out of the sheath like calyx, which, however, remains in place, as do also the two bracts supporting each whorl. When all the purple corollas have fallen and only the rings of the persistent calyces remain, the resemblance to an ear of corn, which Culpepper points out, is very marked.

The plant does not rely wholly for its propagation on the four little nutlets that ripen within the continually reddening calyx, even though the flowering season is particularly long, lasting through all the summer months, for its creeping stems can throw out roots at every point, new plants thus being formed, as in the case of the Bugle. It is from the creeping stems that the flowering spikes arise,

standing upright among the herbage, 3 inches to a foot in height.

The leaves, oblong in form and blunt, about an inch long and 1/2 inch broad, grow on short stalks in pairs down the square stem, from which they stand out boldly, and are often roughish on the top, with scattered, close hairs, their mid-rib at the back also carrying hairs and their margins fringed with tiny hairs. Their outline is either one continuous line, or they are slightly indented along their margins.

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**---Habitat---**Self-Heal is a very common plant throughout Britain and all over Europe, abundant in pastures and on waste ground. In open and exposed situations, the plant is diminutive, while in more sheltered spots it is larger in all its parts. It branches freely, lateral stems being thrown out in pairs at almost every node, from which the leaves spring. The main stem is often deeply grooved and rough to the touch, the lower parts tinted with reddish purple.

Self-Heal is one of those common wildflowers that have found their way to North America, tending even to oust the native flowers. It is known there as 'Heart of the Earth' and 'Blue Curls.'

Cole, in *Adam in Eden* (1657), says:

'It is called by modern writers (for neither the ancient Greek nor Latin writers knew it) Brunella, from Brunellen, which is a name given unto it by the Germans, because it cureth that inflammation of the mouth which they call "die Breuen," yet the general name of it in Latin nowadays is Prunella, as being a word of a more gentile pronunciation.'

Cole further explains that the disease in question 'is common to soldiers when they lye in camp, but especially in garrisons, coming with an extraordinary inflammation or swelling, as well in the mouth as throat, the very signature of the Throat which the form of the Floures so represent signifying as much' - an instance of the doctrine of signatures of which William Cole was such a ready exponent.

'There is not a better Wound herbe,' says Gerard, 'in the world than that of SelfHeale is, the very name importing it to be very admirable upon this account and indeed the Virtues doe make it good, for this very herbe without the mixture of any other ingredient, being onely bruised and wrought with the point of a knife upon a trencher or the like, will be brought into the form of a salve, which will heal any green wounde even in the first intention, after a very wonderful manner, The decoction of Prunell made with wine and water doth join together and make whole and sound all wounds, both inward and outward, even as Bugle doth. To be short, it serveth for the same that the Bugle serveth and in the world there are not two better wound herbs as hath been often proved.'

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**---Constituents---**The chemical principles of Bugle and Self-Heal resemble those of the other Labiate herbs, comprising a volatile oil; some bitter principle, not yet analysed; tannin, to which its chief medicinal use due; sugar and cellulose.

**---Part Used---**The whole herb, collected when in best condition in mid-summer.

**---Medicinal Action and Uses---**Astringent, styptic and tonic.

Self-Heal is still in use in modern herbal treatment as a useful astringent for inward or outward use.

An infusion of the herb, made from 1 OZ. to a pint of boiling water, and taken in doses of a wineglassful, is considered a general strengthener. Sweetened with honey, it is good for a sore and relaxed throat or ulcerated mouth, for both of which purposes it also makes a good gargle. For internal bleeding and for piles, the infusion is also used as an injection.

Culpepper, explaining the name 'Self-Heal whereby when you are hurt, you may heal yourself,' tells us that:

'it is an especial herb for inward or outward wounds. Take it inwardly in syrups for inward wounds, outwardly in unguents and plasters for outward. As Self-Heal is like Bugle in form, so also in the qualities and virtues, serving for all purposes, whereunto Bugle is applied with good success either inwardly or outwardly, for inward wounds or ulcers in the body, for bruises or falls and hurts. If it be combined with Bugle, Sanicle and other like wound herbs, it will be more effectual to wash and inject into ulcers in the parts outwardly.... It is an especial remedy for all green wounds to close the lips of them and to keep the place from further inconveniences. The juice used with oil of roses to annoint the temples and forehead is very effectual to remove the headache, and the same mixed with honey of roses cleaneth and healeth ulcers in the mouth and throat.'