

# Wonderful Weeds



## **Dandelion** (*Taraxacum officinale*) Asteraceae

**Common Names:** Dandelion, dent du lion, fluffy puffy, Priest's crown, swine's snout

**Parts Used:** Leaves, Roots, Flowers

**Uses:** an edible and very nutritious plant full of calcium, phosphorus, iron, sodium, potassium and magnesium. Its young leaves can be used in salads, & flowers can be made into fritters. The roots make a coffee substitute. As a herbal medicine dandelion is very important. Used as a better diuretic than any over the counter products as it also replaces the potassium lost from the body when diuretics are used. The whole plant has a cleansing effect on the liver, and is good for treating gallbladder and urinary disorders and skin complaints. It has an antibacterial effect and taking it inhibits growth of many common bacteria including those that cause Pneumonia, Meningitis and Diphtheria.

**History and Folklore** First mentioned in herbals in Arabia in the 10th Century, and greatly valued ever since. As recently as the 1930s, 'root diggers' made a living out of digging up dandelion

roots in East Anglia. This was so common that a special 'green herb' rate was charged for transporting them on trains to London. As it is a diuretic, children used to be warned against picking it in case it made them wet the bed. You can still buy Dandelion and Burdock cordial in the North of England where methodists used to sell it in their Temperance Bars.

## **Sticky Willie** (*Galium aparine*) Rubiaceae

**Common Names:** Cleavers, Goosegrass, Sticky Willy, Barweed, Hayrifle, Scratweed, Everlasting Friendship

**Part Used:** Herb

**Uses:** A valuable diuretic used to treat skin problems such as eczema and psoriasis and for general detoxifying. It has been used as a poultice for wounds and ulcers. It is often used with other spring herbs in a tea as a spring tonic, and has a positive effect on lymphatic drainage, so is good for treating conditions such as glandular fever, ME, tonsillitis, hepatitis etc.

**History and Folklore:**

Sticky Willie has long been used domestically, and is still commonly prescribed by modern herbalists. The plant used to be fed to chickens to fatten them up, giving it the name goosegrass. In the Hebrides they used to bunch the strands together and use it as a sieve.



## **Nettles** (*Urtica dioica*) Urticaceae

**Common Names:** Stinging Nettle

**Parts Used:** Herbs, Seeds

**Uses:** Nettles are very nutritious and easily digested, containing high levels of iron and vitamins A and C. A prime example of the overlap between food and medicine. The leaves are traditionally eaten in soups, or drunk in a tea as a cleansing tonic and blood purifier. Nettles are an extremely good preventative of hay fever lowering histamines in the body.



An infusion of nettle is good for stemming internal bleeding so can treat anaemia, excessive menstruation and any haemorrhaging. The sting of a nettle is used to treat rheumatism and arthritis, by bringing blood to the surface. The juice of the nettle is an antidote to its own sting.

**History and Folklore**

Romans used to flay themselves with nettles to keep warm on long marches. This is called urtication. Before the introduction of Flax, nettle fibres were used to make thread and cloths in Germanic and Scandinavian nations. In Scotland it was said that you used to eat nettles, sleep in nettle sheets and dine off a nettle tablecloth.

**Rosebay Willow Herb** (*Chamerion angustifolium*)

Onagraceae

**Common Names:** Great Hairy Willowherb, Fireweed

**Parts Used:** Flowers, Stems, Roots

**Uses:** The young stems can be picked and eaten as a good source of vitamin C and A. The plant is astringent, and traditionally syrups were made out of the flowers to treat diarrhoea and irritable bowel syndrome. In Germany and Austria it is used to treat prostate problems and mouth ulcers. As a wound healer it has been used to treat burns, skin sores, swellings and boils.

**History and Folklore:**

The fluffy, feathery seed hairs used to be used to stuff mattresses in Scotland, or as tinder to start fires. It is well known to bee keepers as a great source of nectar and in Russia they make a monofloral honey out of it.



**Chickweed** (*Stellaria media*) Caryophyllaceae

**Common Names:** Starweed

**Parts Used:** Herb

**Uses:** Chickweed has a great reputation among herbalists, and is primarily used externally for skin conditions as a cream or ointment. It is known to soothe severe itchiness even where other remedies have failed. It can be added to bath water to ease roseola, fragile superficial veins, inflammations, rheumatic joints and can encourage tissue repair.

**History and Folklore:**

Chickweed is thought to be the world's most successful weed, with the widest distribution of any plant. It goes through many generations in a single growing season. It has been used as a weather forecaster - when its flowers and leaves are open fully, good weather can be expected. "If it should shut up, the traveller is to put on his greatcoat."

A. GRÄSSTJÄRNBLOMMA, STELLARIA GRAMINEA L.  
B. VÄTARV, STELLARIA MEDIA CYE.

## Shepherd's Purse (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*) Brassicaceae

**Common Names:** Lady's purse, Witche's pouches, rattle pouches, case weed, pepper and salt

**Parts Used:** Herb

**Uses:** Used to treat both internal and external bleeding as a wound healer. A tea made from the dried herb is said to be a sovereign remedy against haemorrhages of all kinds.

**History and Folklore:** An interesting example of a plant which is viewed in some parts of the world as an annoying weed, and in others it is cultivated for its uses. It is grown as a cabbage flavoured spring green, and in Japan it is specifically grown as an important ingredient in a ceremonial rice and barley dish. The seed of the plant in water, attracts mosquitos and then is toxic to the larvae. A kilo of seed is said to be able to kill 10 million larvae.



## Self Heal (*Prunella vulgaris*) Lamiaceae

**Common Names:** Prunella, All Heal, Hook Heal, Heart of the Earth, Pickpocket

**Parts Used:** Herb

**Uses:** Indicated by its name, self heal has a long history of folk use, especially in the treatment of wounds, ulcers and sores. It was taken internally as a tea to treat fevers, diarrhoea, sore mouth and internal bleeding. It was considered a general strengthener.

**History and Folklore:** The plant was known as an indicator of poor soil, and so was given the name of pickpocket as it was thought responsible for impoverishing the soil. It was used to heal cuts, boils and infected fingers, giving it the name of 'carpenter's herb.' The plant was deemed so precious that children were warned not to pick it without reason or the devil would carry them away.



## Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) Asteraceae

**Common Names:** Soldier's Woundwort, Thousand Weed, Bloodwort, Herba militaris, Knight's Milfoil

**Parts Used:** Herb

**Uses:** Yarrow is mostly known for its ability to staunch bleeding, relieve pain, reduce fevers and as an anti inflammatory. This makes it an excellent first aid plant, also one which is very commonly found. It also has potential as a digestive aid, menstrual remedy, and mild sedative.

**History and Folklore:** As recently as the 20th Century it was considered lucky to attach a sprig of yarrow to a child's cot to bring it a long and healthy life. Achilles is said to have discovered it, and used it to heal the wounded in battle. The Ancient's called it the Herbal Militaris after its vulnerary prowess. Pollen samples of yarrow were found in the grave of a Neanderthal man in Northern Iraq suggesting it has been known as an important herb for potentially 600,000 years.





**Plantain** (*Plantago major/lancelota*) Plantaginaceae  
**Common Names:** Plantain, waybread, englishman's foot

**Parts Used:** Leaves, but seeds and roots are mineral rich

**Uses:** one of the most versatile of herbal medicines - has a beneficial effect on all body tissues. An excellent neuralgic remedy, good for kidney and bladder disorders. Safe and effective treatment for bleeding. Leaves are taken internally for diarrhoea, gastritis, irritable bowel syndrome, cystitis, bronchitis, asthma, hay fever. Distilled water from the plant makes an eye lotion that has been used for centuries. Externally it is used for skin inflammations, cuts, insect stings and bites, sprains and fractures. The heated leaves are a wet dressing for wounds. Root is a remedy for certain species of rattle snakes.

### History & Folklore:

Plantain was one of the most prized herbs of the Anglo Saxons, appearing in poems celebrating the 'Lay of the Nine Healing Herbs.' Maoris and Native American's called it White Man's foot as it seemed to spring up everywhere the white man walked

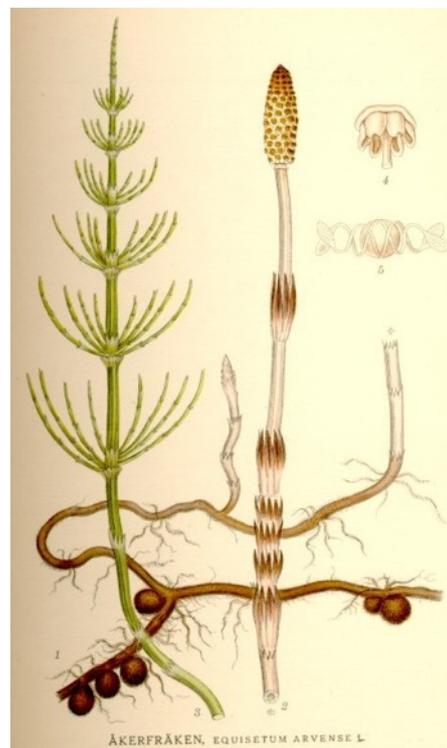
### Horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*) Equisteraceae

**Common Names:** Field Horsetail, Common Horsetail, Bottle Brush, Paddock Pipes

**Parts Used:** Herb

**Uses:** Horsetails boast an unusual chemistry, containing silica, numerous alkaloids including nicotine, and many minerals. It makes an excellent wound healer due to its clotting action in staunching blood. It can also help speed up the repair of damaged connective tissue. Horsetail contains potent constituents and should only be used under the supervision of an experienced practitioner.

**History and Folklore:** The Horsetails are not related to any other British Plants. They are primitive and spore bearing, and most closely related to ferns. Our common horsetail is directly descended from a giant of the dinosaur period and has changed little since then apart from in size. Its scratchy silica crystals make it ideal for cleaning and it was commonly used as a potscrubber. In Anglo Saxon it was called dysshwashynges. It was also used to polish pewter and sand timber.



### Useful Books and Websites

Mrs Grieve's Modern Herbal online - [www.botanical.com](http://www.botanical.com)

Plants for a Future - [www.pfaf.org](http://www.pfaf.org)

Hedgerow Medicine - [www.hedgerowmedicine.co.uk](http://www.hedgerowmedicine.co.uk)

Gabriella Hatfield "Hatfield's Herbal: The Secret History of British Plants"

Thomas Bartram "Bartram's Encyclopedia of herbal Medicine"

Simon Mills "The Essential Book of Herbal Medicine"

Mrs Grieves "A Modern herbal"

Nicolas Culpeper "Complete Herbal and English Physician"

David Hoffman "The Holistic Herbal"