

Chickweed

(*Stellaria media*)

Caryophyllaceae

As I walk out the back door, I am confronted with chickweed, one of the most common herbs in my yard right now. And it's blooming.

For many, it might be considered invasive. It's coming up in my flowerpots, garden beds, in my pathways, and all over the yard, forming a thick mat in many places. For me, I see an abundance of food and medicine.

I will be using it in my salads as an edible green, making tinctures with organic apple cider vinegar, and infusing it in oil to make healing salves.

Chickweed loves the cool, moist weather that we have been having. I pull it up by the roots and place it in a bowl with water in the bottom. It continues to grow. It makes it convenient to pick a few leaves each day to add to soups, salads, or vegetables.

Chickweed is easy to recognize at this time of year. It is a weak-stemmed plant that comes up in late fall in southeastern Virginia and grows through the winter, sprawling across the ground or draping over the pot it has invaded. Leaves are small and grow in pairs on the stem. At the ends of the stems are the flowers with five white petals that are deeply notched, giving them the appearance of having 10 petals.

Chickweed is both food and medicine. It is high in many nutrients, including calcium, phosphorous, magnesium, potassium, and vitamin C. As a food, chickweed can be eaten raw in salads, in pesto or herb spreads, chopped and infused with water as a tea or added to soups.

Chickweed has a reputation of being a weight-reducing herb. According to Matthew Wood (*The Earthwise Herbal, Volume 1: A Complete Guide to Old World Medicinal Plants, 2008*), it "regulates water levels and drives off excess dampness and fats."

Chickweed's chemical constituents include saponins, coumarins, flavonoids, and triterpenoids. Energetically, chickweed is cooling. As a demulcent, it is soothing and protects irritated or inflamed tissue.

Medicinally, it can be used as an antirheumatic, vulnerary, and emollient (David Hoffman, *Medical Herbalism, 2003*). According to Rosalee de la Floret, chickweed is a mild expectorant and can be used to treat coughs due to dry and irritated



lungs and to move mucus stuck in the lungs. Inflamed skin conditions can be relieved with a salve or poultice made from chickweed.

Chickweed Vinegar

*an excellent way to
extract minerals from greens*

2 cups chopped chickweed
2-3 cups organic apple cider vinegar (enough
to cover the herbs)
1 tbsp. honey, optional

Place the herbs in a jar and cover with vinegar. Cover with a plastic or glass lid or use parchment paper between the vinegar and a metal lid. Store in a pantry for 2-4 weeks. Strain and add to salads, cooked greens, or vegetables.