



Common Chickweed

STELLARIA MEDIA



HABITAT

Waste and cultivated ground, preferring richer soils.

PARTS USED

Leaves and young stems.

Virtually no corner of Britain remains untouched by that sprawling little plant chickweed. Found almost all year round. Normally the only folks who really give chickweed a second glance are eagle-eyed gardeners since the plant spreads rapidly, requiring copious weeding.

The plant is weak and straggly and yet it has medicinal properties. Made into a poultice it was once used to help heal wounds, skin irritations and inflammation. In Culpepper's day it was '*boyled with Hogs-Greas*' to make an ointment, and one old herbal pronounces that '*the juice taken inwardly is good against the scurvy*'.

The Latin name for the plant, *Stellaria*, means 'little star' while *media* refers to 'middle', there being other chickweeds and related species.

Technically chickweed belongs to the Caryophyllaceae family and is an annual plant. With sprawling stems, sometimes up to 30 cm, it likes moist, disturbed, cultivated and waste ground. Flowering virtually all year round - hence its prolific spreading capacity - the soft green leaves are oval or elliptical and are placed in opposite pairs. Lower leaves are stalked while those at the upper part of the stems are not.

Chickweed contains calcium, potassium and saponins and has been used as a foodstuff by both man and beast, or rather chickens. Saponins, however, are potentially poisonous judging from what the author has managed to research on the internet, so it is perhaps advisable not to eat raw chickweed in very large quantities.

[Taken from 'The Essential Nettle, Dandelion, Thistle & Chickweed Cookbook' by Johnny Jumbalaya.]

Consumption of wild plants is at the reader's discretion and own risk. For personal safety do not eat wild plants if you have a medical condition, during pregnancy, or feed to minors.

WHEN TRYING ONE OF THE WILD PLANTS LISTED FOR THE FIRST TIME, TRY TASTING JUST A SMALL AMOUNT OF THE PREPARED PLANT TO CHECK YOUR TOLERANCE. IF YOU HAVE ANY BAD OR ALLERGIC REACTIONS AVOID ANY FURTHER CONSUMPTION. NEVER PUT ANY PLANT INTO YOUR MOUTH UNLESS ABSOLUTELY 100% CERTAIN OF ITS IDENTIFICATION AND EDIBILITY.

CHICKEN & CHICKWEED SOUP

Chickweed
1/2-1 pint chicken [or other] stock
Flour or cornflour [optional]
Cream

Yes, it's time to embarrass the locals again and go a-gathering chickweed. What must they think of you by now?

- Since chickweed has a delicate flavour and also requires very little cooking, place in a pan with a small knob of butter and wilt the leaves - which will take about 2 minutes. You will need several good handfuls of the greens as chickweed shrinks in volume when cooked.

- In a separate pan place the stock.
- Bring to the boil then turn down the heat.
- Add the wilted chickweed [or just add the leaves raw] and stir in a good dollop of cream. Serve.

VARIATIONS

For a thicker soup add the thickening agent to the stock before you bring it to the boil, and maintain the heat until it has cooked before combining with the chickweed. Chicken stock could be replaced by stock made from any other meat leftovers and bones recently prepared. For a more spicy alternative to the chicken soup try seasoning with a little ginger, nutmeg, paprika or turmeric.

[Recipe extract from 'The *Really* Wild Food Guide'.]

CHICKWEED, APPLE & RAISIN SALAD

1 tbsp. raisins [or sultanas]
Water
1 apple - diced
Ground cinnamon - pinch
Butter or oil
1-2 handfuls chickweed

Apple and raisins, and apples and dates are taste combinations which are well suited to each other. So here is a simple spiced up version with some chickweed greens.

- Soak the raisins in hot water for about 10 minutes.
- Heat a little butter in a skillet and gently warm through the apple pieces, adding a pinch of cinnamon.

- Put the chickweed in a bowl.
- Drain the raisins and add.
- Then add the apples and juices from the pan and mix everything thoroughly.
- Serve with some couscous or rice perhaps.

[Recipe extract from 'The *Essential* Nettle, Dandelion, Thistle & Chickweed Cookbook'.]

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