SELF-HEAL

Prunella vulgaris
[proo-NELL-uh vul-GAY-ris]

Family: Labiatae

Pharmaceutical Name: Spica Prunellae Vulgaris

Names: allheal, prunella, sicklewort, woundwort, heal-all, Heart-of-the-Earth, brownwort, carpenter’s herb, hookweed, blue curls, dragonhead, sickleweed, carpenter weed; Gemeine Brunelle (German); Xu Ku Cao, Xia Ku Cao (Chinese); Brunört (Swedish); Blákoll (Norwegian); Almindelig Brunelle (Danish); Niittyhumala (Finland); Blákolla (Icelandic); Apsiphiá (Greek); betonica del pais (Spanish); kagoso (Japanese); hagoch’o (Korean)

Description: A perennial that grows to 2 feet in height, though sometimes horizontal. Usually the plant is much tufted and the leaves are round and bractlike. The square stems bear ovate, entire or slightly-toothed leaves, narrowing as they progress up the stem. The mauve-pink flowers are in tightly-packed whorls, the florets opening irregularly from midsummer. They are found in the axils of the leaves, in a close spike or head.

Cultivation: Perennial to Zones 3-4. Prefers moist, well-drained soil in sun or light shade with a pH of 6-7. Stratify seeds for at least 1 month before sowing. Propagate by seed sown in autumn or spring, or by division in spring. Germinates in 1-3 weeks with a spacing of 8-12 inches and a soil temperature of 60-70F. Transplant outdoors in mid- to late spring. Water moderately. It is rather invasive but easily controlled. The roots spread underground and shoot up, forming new plants. These can be separated and transplanted. The plants are cut in summer when flowering and dried for use in infusions, ointments, and tinctures. The flower spikes are cut in late autumn and dried for use in decoctions. Best used fresh but it can be dried and stored for up to 6 months for use in tea. Fresh self-heal juice can be preserved by mixing it with a small proportion of vodka (75% juice to 5% vodka).

History: Self-heal has a long history of use in traditional medicine. It was first mentioned in Chinese medical literature during the Han dynasty, mainly for complaints associated with disturbed liver energy. European herbalists
have always regarded it primarily as a wound herb. Its ability to stop bleeding gave it an assortment of other names including carpenter’s herb, sicklewort and woundwort. The generic name *Prunella* is thought to be a corruption of *Brunella*, from the German *Brunellen*, which relates to the power this herb was thought to possess of curing an inflammation of the mouth known as *die Brellen*.

**Properties:** astringent, slightly bitter, saline herb that lowers fever and blood pressure, stimulates the liver and gall bladder and promotes healing. Diuretic, antibacterial and alterative effects; antipyretic; refrigerant to liver; reduces swelling of lymph glands

**Constituents:** pentacyclic triterpenes (ursolic, betulinic, oleanolic acids), tannins, caffeic acid, Vitamins B1, C, K

**Energetics:** pungent and bitter; cold

**Meridians/Organs affected:** liver, gall bladder

**Medicinal Uses:** All above-ground parts of the plant are useful. It can be used fresh, or dried for later use. Make it into a tincture, an infusion, or an ointment for topical use. Internally, selfheal has been used in Western medicine for hemorrhage and to decrease excessive menstruation. Externally in Western medicine, used for minor injuries, sores, burns, bruises, sore throat, mouth inflammations, and hemorrhoids (whole plant). The juice of a crushed stem or two will soothe nettle stings, minor bouts with poison ivy, insect bites and stings. Because it contains the compound rosmarinic acid, it is used for treatment of Graves Disease as it helps suppress thyroid hormone production.

Self-heal contains substances that are diuretic and act against tumors. Lab tests indicate it may also be antibiotic, hypotensive and antimutagenic in action. In making an oil infusion let the plants wilt for a full day to increase the shelf life of the oil.

Research: A 1993 Canadian study regarding HIV-1 found that a purified extract of Selfheal was able to significantly inhibit HIV-1 replication with very low toxicity. The extract was able to inhibit HIV-1 in both lymph and blood. Although prunellin was unable to prevent HIV-1 infection when cells were pretreated with the purified herbal extract, the virus’ ability to cause infection was dramatically decreased when it was saturated with prunellin. The purified extract was also able to block cell-to-cell transmission of HIV-1. Moreover, the extract was also able to interfere with the ability of HIV-1 to bind to CD4 cells. The researchers suggest that the purified extract antagonizes HIV-1 infection of susceptible cells by preventing viral attachment to the CD4 receptor.

**TCM:**

**Indications:** jaundice: sore and swollen eyeballs; over-sensitivity to light; headache and dizziness; gout; scrofula; high blood pressure. In Chinese medicine it is often combined with *Dendranthema x grandiflorum* for headaches, high blood pressure, mumps, mastitis, conjunctivitis and hyperactivity in children related to liver energy problems (flowers). Chinese research shows the herb to have a moderately strong antibiotic actions against a broad range of pathogens, including the *Shigella* species and *e. coli* strains of which can cause enteritis and urinary infections. Studies also indicate that self-heal has a mildly dilating effect on the blood vessels, helping to lower blood pressure. In China, self-heal is taken on its own or with Chrysanthemum for fevers, headaches, dizziness, and vertigo, and to soothe and calm inflamed and sore eyes. It is thought to cool “liver fire” resulting from liver weakness, and is prescribed for infected and enlarged glands, especially the lymph nodes of the neck.

**Major Combinations:** With Ju Hua and Shi Jue Ming for headache, dizziness, vertigo, and pain and redness in the eyes due to ascending Liver fire. With Xiang Fu for eye pain with excessive tearing. Add Dang Gui and Bai Shao
for eye pain that increases during the evening or night due to Liver deficiency. With Xuan Shen and Mu Li for nodules due to phlegm-fire. With Chai Hu for neck nodules due to constrained Liver qi.

Contraindications: Use with caution in cases of Spleen or Stomach deficiency.

Dosage: 9-15g. up to 30g when used alone. Good quality is dark, reddish purple with large spikes.

Remedies:
Tincture: Use for all sorts of bleeding, including heavy menstruation and blood in the urine
Infusion: Use cool for the same ailments as the tincture. Can be helpful as an astringent, bitter herb in diarrhea and as a spring tonic
Poultice: apply the fresh leaves to clean wounds
Ointment: apply to bleeding hemorrhoids
Eyewash: Use a very weak, well-strained infusion for hot, tired eyes or conjunctivitis
Mouthwash or gargle: 1½ Tbsp of fresh self-heal or 1 heaping tsp of the dried Herbal Connection 1 cup very hot water

Place the herb in a pot or cup, pour the hot water over it, cover, and let it steep for 10-15 minutes. Use this mouthwash or gargle 3-4 times a day, including at bedtime.

Homeopathic Uses: Used primarily for colitis

Flower Essence: Self heal flower essences is one of the most fundamental and broadly applicable remedies for true soul healing and balance. It address a very special relationship between the etheric or life body and the Spiritual Self. It is especially indicated for those who have lost belief in their own capacity to be well, or have abdicated this inherent responsibility to healers or others. It is a very beneficial remedy for those who face great healing challenges, whether physical, mental, or spiritual.

Ritual Uses: Herb of Venus. Druids gathered self-heal in a manner similar to that used for vervain. It was to be picked when the Dog Star was rising, at night, during the dark of the moon. It as dug up by the roots with the Druid’s golden sickle and then held a lot in the left hand. After prayers of thanksgiving were said, the flowers, leaves, and stalks were separated for drying. Place self-heal on the altar when working healing magic. And be sure to leave a gift for the Earth to compensate her for her loss when you pick this precious herb.

References:

Resources:
Companion Plants, www.companionplants.com
Crimson Sage, http://www.crimson-sage.com

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