 Capsella bursa-pastoris
[kap-SEL-luh BUR-suh PAS-tor-is]
(syn Thlaspi bursa-pastoris)

Family: Cruciferae

Names: caseweed, lady’s purse, pepper and salt, shepherd’s bag, witches’ pouches, pickpocket, toywort; shovelweed, shepherd’s heart, peppergrass, poor man’s pharmacy, mother’s heart, case weed, St. James’ Wot, Rattle pouches, Clappedepouch, pickpurse, cocowort, poor man’s permecity, shepherd’s sprout; Kaletka Pasterska, bydelnik, tobolek, Tasnik (Polish); Hirtentäschel(kraut) (German); bourse-à-pasteur, capselle (French)

Description: An annual or biennial growing 6-24 inches in height depending on growing conditions. The main leaves, which are green, rough and divided like a feather, form a rosette from which the erect stem rises to tiny, white, 4-petaled flowers. The stem rises from the crown of the taproot. The small, flat, heart-shaped pods are the best way to identify this plant. The pods contain a portion of the roughly 40,000 seeds a single plant is capable of producing. A sticky, sweet substance covering the seeds attracts various microscopic animals that, once trapped, are unable to extricate themselves from their predicament. By absorbing the protein and other nutrients from these creatures, the Capsella seeds gain the necessary strength to develop into vigorous new shepherd’s purses.

Cultivation: Grow it from seed in a sun or partial shade with moderate water. Plant in spring and self-seeds freely. Tolerates poor conditions. Whole plants are cut from late spring to autumn and used fresh for extracts. Leaves are picked fresh for culinary use.

History: This herb’s common name derives from the appearance of the seed pods, which resemble small, heart-shaped purses. From the Latin capsella, small box, referring to the shape of the fruit, a silicle. During the First World War, when the standard herbal medicine for staunching blood were unobtainable in Britain, shepherd’s purse was used as an alternative.
The Irish name *clappedepouch* alludes to the former custom of lepers begging at major crosswords. They received their alms in a wooden cup that was attached to a long pole, reminiscent of a shepherd’s purse seedpod at the end of its stalk. Language of Flowers: I offer you all.

**Properties:** antiscorbutic, diuretic, astringent, hemostatic, alterative

**Constituents:** flavonoids, alcoloid (bursin), polypeptides, choline, acetylcholine, histamine, amino-phenol, diosmin, and tyramine; tannins, minerals

**Energetics:** pungent, sweet, neutral

**Meridians/Organs affected:** liver, stomach

**Medicinal Uses:** When dried and infused, it yields a tea as a specific for stopping hemorrhages of the stomach, lungs, and especially of the kidneys. Its antiscorbutic, stimulant and diuretic action caused it to be much used in kidney complaints and dropsy. Used to stop heavy menstruation. A tincture made from the fresh herb and taken every hour or two is one of the most effective hemostatics. To make a styptic solution, boil 3 oz of herb in two pints of hot water. Internal dose is 2 tsp every four hours. To make a healing ointment, simmer for a half hour one heaping Tbsp of ground plantain and shepherd’s purse leaves in 4 oz of lard or suet. Strain into containers. An astringent herb, it disinfects the urinary tract in cases of cystitis, and is taken for diarrhea. Because of its reputed stimulant, diuretic, and antiscorbutic action, the weed has been much used in the treatment of numerous kidney complaints. Also for hypertension and postpartum bleeding. Research suggests that the plant is anti-inflammatory and reduces fever. The secret of Capsella’s blood-clotting ability is its content of vitamin K. For an almost instant arrest of nosebleed, many people simply soak a cotton swab with the freshly expressed juice of shepherd’s purse and insert it into the affected nostril.

Many people take an infusion as a refreshing spring tonic, in the belief that it relieves such circulatory disturbances as hypertension, varicose veins, arteriosclerosis and hemorrhoids. European herbalists have found that a sitz bath infused with shepherd’s purse is particularly soothing for hemorrhoid sufferers. Add a strong decoction of the leaves to warm bathwater, which should be deep enough to cover the kidneys as well. At the end of 20 minutes, instead of drying oneself, wrap up in a terry robe or bath sheet and, covered with a light blanket, sweat for an hour in bed.

Shepherd’s purse also plays an important role in a mixture recommended for bed-wetting. Herbalist Richard Lucas suggests steeping for a few hours ½ oz each of shepherd’s purse, agrimony, lady’s slipper, corn silk, oak bark and crushed licorice root in 2 pints boiling water. Strain, add 2 oz glycerin. Dose: one teaspoonful before each meal and at bedtime.

Infusion: Pour a cup of boiling water onto 1-2 tsp of the dried herb and leave to infuse for 10 minutes. If it is used for menstrual conditions, it should be drunk every 2-3 hours during and just before the period. Otherwise drink it three times a day.

Tincture: Take 1-2 ml of the tincture three times a day.

In Chinese medicine to cool the blood, dysentery and eye problems.

**Remedies:**

**Postpartum Bleeding:** Fresh shepherd’s purse tincture, 40-60 drops, given in water soon after birthing, acts quickly to stop bleeding. Repeat again every two to five minutes if needed.

**Heavy Menstrual Bleeding:** 2 parts shepherd’s purse (fresh); 2 parts lady’s mantle leaves and flowers; 3 parts yarrow; 1 part partridgeberry leaves. Make into tincture and take 20-60 drops of tincture 4-6 times a day when bleeding or take 30-50 drops every hour or more if needed.

**Toxicity:** Do not take during pregnancy
Culinary Uses. The young leaves are rich in vitamins A, B, and C and may be included in salads or cole slaw, raw or cooked; the leaves and fruits in soup, especially combined with peppergrass. The leaves have a distinct peppery flavor which becomes more pronounced as the leaves mature. When the plant is very young, the roots are still tender and can be eaten. Later on, they become too woody. Shepherd’s Purse is eaten in Eastern Asia. In Japan it is one of the seven herbs of spring, traditionally cooked with rice and other wild plants. The pungent seeds can be employed as a spice when dried and ground. They make an excellent seasoning for soups and stews. A good method for drying the seeds is to spread them in a single layer on a cheese cloth lined cookie sheet. Place in warm place for three to four days. Store tightly covered. To freeze Shepard’s Purse, pour boiling water over rinsed greens; drain well and pack into freezer containers. Frozen greens are best when used within eight months.

Recipes:
Shepherd’s Purse Seed Salad Dressing
1 cup salad oil
½ cup tomato sauce
¼ cup fresh lemon juice
¼ cup green Shepard’s Purse seeds
½ tsp salt
1 Tbsp Worcestershire sauce
2 tsp sugar
1 tsp dry mustard
½ tsp pepper
2 cloves garlic, minced

Place all ingredients in blender and blend until smooth. Serve over salad greens. (How to Prepare Common Wild Foods)

Shepherd’s Purse Macaroni and Cheese
1 cup elbow macaroni
2/3 cup green Shepherd’s Purse seeds
½ cup milk
½ lb mild cheddar cheese
¼ tsp pepper
1 cup buttered bread crumbs

Boil macaroni and seeds in salted water until macaroni is tender. Drain. Place in casserole. Heat milk and cheese over low heat until cheese is melted. Add pepper and pour over macaroni; toss with fork. Top with crumbs and bake 325F for 35 minutes. (How to Prepare Common Wild Foods)

Potato Shepherd’s Purse Soup
2 cups water
3 large potatoes, peeled and diced
1 cup onion, diced
½ cup shepherd’s purse greens, chopped
2 stalks celery, diced
1 tsp salt
2 strips bacon, fried crisp
1 2/3 cup milk

Cook potatoes in water along with onion, Shepherd’s purse, celery and salt until potatoes are tender. Puree in blender after slightly cooled until smooth. Add milk and heat thoroughly. Do not boil. Sprinkle with bacon. (How to Prepare Common Wild Foods)

Shepherd’s Purse and Egg Casserole
½ lb Shepherd’s Purse greens
½ lb either chickweed, nettle, dandelion or miner’s lettuce greens, chopped
¼ cup margarine
½ cup flour
½ tsp salt
1 ½ cups milk
½ cup bread crumbs
2 hard-cooked eggs, sliced thin
1 cup cheddar cheese, grated
1 strip bacon, cut into 1” lengths

Simmer greens in ½ cup water in covered pot for 10 minutes. Drain thoroughly. Melt margarine in saucepan. Blend in flour and salt. Add milk slowly and heat, stirring constantly until sauce is thickened. Butter casserole, layer ½ bread crumbs, ½ greens, ½ eggs, ½ sauce and ½ cheese. Repeat layers. Arrange bacon on top. Bake in 350F oven for 40 minutes. (How to Prepare Common Wild Foods)

Shepherd’s Purse Cheese Mold
1 3 oz pkg lemon flavored gelatin
1 cup boiling water
1 cup whipped cream
1 cup mild cheddar cheese, grated
¼ cup pimento, diced
½ cup black olives, sliced
¼ cup lemon juice
¼ cup green Shepherd’s Purse seeds
½ cup pecans, chopped
¼ cup sweet gherkins, minced

Dissolve gelatin in water. Chill until mixture thickens. Beat gelatin mixture with electric mixer. Fold in remaining ingredients. Pour into mold and chill until firm. (How to Prepare Common Wild Foods)

Reference: