CRANESBILL, AMERICAN

*Geranium maculatum* (jer-AY-nee-um) (mak-yuh-LAH-tum)

**Family:** Geraniaceae

**Names:** alum bloom, alum root, American kind, American tormentil, astringent root, chocolate flower, common crane’s bill, cranesbill, cranesbill geranium, crowfoot, dovesfoot, old-maid’s nightcap, shameface, spotted geranium, spotted cranesbill, storks bill, tormentil, wild geranium, wild cranesbill

**Description:** Perennial growing to 2 feet. Hairy, erect, green branched stem from a rhizome. A few long petioled basal leaves, pedately cleft into 5-7 cuneately laciniate segments, single pair of short petioled leaves from the stem. A few flowered terminal pink-purple flowers, and beak-shaped fruit (elongate capsules up to 5 cm long, erect, tipped with the persistent style).

**Cultivation:** Native to woodlands of eastern and central North America. Succeeds in any moderately fertile retentive soil in a sunny position. Tolerates a wide range of soil types, including water-logged soils. Plants are hardy to about 7°F. Embers of this genus are rarely if ever troubled by browsing deer or rabbits. Propagate by seed sown in spring in a cold frame. When they are large enough to handle, prick the seedlings out into individual pots and plant them out in the summer. Division in spring or autumn. Larger clumps can be replanted direct into their permanent positions, though it is best to pot up smaller clumps and grow them on in a cold frame until they are rooting well. Plant them out in the spring. The root is dug up in early spring and the aerial parts are gathered in summer.

** Constituents:** up to 30% tannins including gallic acid, with the level being highest just before flowering.

**Actions:** astringent, anti-hemorrhagic, anti-inflammatory, vulnerary, anti-catarrhal

**Energetics:** astringent, bitter, neutral

** Meridians/organs affected:** stomach, intestines, liver, heart

**History:** Native American peoples used cranesbill for sore throats, canker sores, infected gums, and oral thrush. The herb was later used by European settlers for diarrhea, internal bleeding, cholera and venereal diseases. The botanical name *Geranium* refers to the beaked seeds of the plant, that were likened to the bill of the crane. The rhizomes
when dried produce a purplish brown powder, from which comes the name chocolate flower. Legend says that geraniums were descendants of the mallow. The story goes that once the prophet Mohammed washed his shirt in a stream and laid it on a bed of mallow to dry. The flowers blushed deep pink at their distinction and have been called the geraniums ever since.

**Medicinal Uses:** An astringent and clotting agent, American cranesbill is used today much as in earlier times. The herb is often prescribed for irritable bowel syndrome and hemorrhoids, and it is used to staunch wounds. It may also be used to treat heavy menstrual bleeding and excessive vaginal discharge. As a douche it can be used in leucorrhea. Its powerful astringent action is used in secondary dysentery, diarrhea, and infantile cholera (Boil with milk to which a little cinnamon has been added and the milk cooked down to half its liquid volume.). Troublesome bleeding from the nose, wounds or small vessels, and from the extraction of teeth may be checked effectively by applying the powder to the bleeding orifice and, if possible, covering with a compress of cotton. For Diabetes and Brights disease a decoction taken internally has proven effective. One of the safest and most effective astringent herbs for gastrointestinal problems.

**APPLICATIONS:** For hemorrhoids, combine finely powdered cranesbill with powdered yarrow. Make into an ointment or bolus by then adding melted coconut butter until a consistency is achieved. Roll this mixture into anal suppositories about the thickness of the middle finger. Insert inch-long pieces into the rectum each evening before retiring.

As a vaginal suppository for vaginal discharge, leucorrhoea of various types and to treat vaginal flaccidity, combine cranesbill powder with powders of white oak bark, echinacea, golden seal and raspberry leaf and add coconut butter. Insert three one-inch segments each evening. Seal with a napkin to prevent leakage. Put 1-2 teaspoonfuls of the rhizome in a cup of cold water and bring to the boil. Let simmer for 10-15 minutes. This should be drunk three times a day.

Take 2-4 ml of the tincture three times a day. Combines with meadowsweet, comfrey, marshmallow or agrimony for peptic ulcers in leucorrhea it can be combined with Beth Root.

**HOMEOPATHY:** tincture and triturations of root; infusion of the plant used for diarrhea, dysentery, hemorrhages, leucorrhoea, sore throat.

**Toxicity:** Because of the plant’s highly astringent nature, extracts or decoctions of cranesbill may cause constipation if used for an extended period.

**Other Uses:** a brown dye is obtained from the flowers

**Resources:**
- Companion Plants, [www.companionplants.com](http://www.companionplants.com)
- Crimson Sage, [http://www.crimson-sage.com](http://www.crimson-sage.com)
- Richters, [www.richters.com](http://www.richters.com) seeds, dried root

**References:**

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