SPEEDWELL, COMMON

Veronica officinalis
[veh-RON-ih-kuh oh-fiss-ih-NAH-liss]

Family: Scrophulariaceae

Names: European Tea, cat’s eye, Paul’s betony, gypsyweed, low speedwell, black root, culver’s root, physic root, heath speedwell, Veronica; Przetacznik Lekarski (Polish); Veronika, Echter Ehrenpreis, Wald-Ehrenpreis (German); Véronique officinale, thé d’Europe (French); tè svizzero, veronica (Italian); Common Gypsyweed, Common Speedwell, Drug Speedwell, Fluellin, Sauvadje Te, Yavsan; Årenpris, ärepris (Swedish); Lækjeveronika (Norwegian); Læge-Årenpris (Danish); Rohtotädyke (Finnish); Hárdepla (Icelandic)

Description: A low-growing perennial, it has hairy creeping stems with grayish-green, opposite, oval leaves. Flowering stalks shoot straight up as much as 16 inches above the recumbent portion of the plant, bearing small blue, lavender, or white flowers (May-July) in racemes. The plant reproduces by seed and by runners. It is hardy to zone 3 and is not frost tender. It is in flower from May to August. The flowers are hermaphrodite and are pollinated by flies and bees. The plant is self-fertile. The taste is bitter and astringent with an odor slightly tea-like when dried.

Cultivation: Prefers dry, slightly acid soil in sun or partial shade. Easily grown in a moderately fertile moisture retentive well drained soil. Prefers cool summers. Thrives in light shade or in open sunny positions. Seed - sow autumn 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. If you have sufficient quantity, the seed can be sown in situ in the autumn or the spring. Division in autumn or spring. Larger divisions can be planted out direct into their permanent positions. It is sometimes best to pot up smaller divisions and grow them on in light shade in a greenhouse or cold frame until they are growing away well. Plant them out in the summer or the following spring. Prone to downy and powdery mildews. The aerial parts of the plant are gathered and dried while flowering, during which they should not be turned. Their color should not alter. The drug has a weal smell and a harsh bitter taste.
**History:** The name speedwell comes from an old meaning of the word “speed,” “thrive.” According to the ancient polytheist Greeks, the word *veronica* comes from the *phero*, “I bring,” and *niki*, “victory,” for veronica officinalis, triumphed over all ailments; the orthodox religions translated it into Latin as “true icon”; finally, Catholics dedicated it to St. Veronica, humble and modest but devoted and efficient. An ancient legend is that a maiden named Veronica saw Jesus on his way to Calvary and, observing the suffering on his face, thought she would wipe away some of the anguish with her handkerchief, which was scented with speedwell, which gave the scientific name. It was said to cure gout. North American Indians used it in a decoction in case of poisoning to provoke vomiting; during sacred rituals, they made those who could not tolerate hallucinogenic herbs drink it.

**Constituents:** Contains aucuboside, iridoid glycosides (aucubin, esters of catalpol such as veronicoside, minecoside and verproside); acetophenone glucosides (pungenin, isopungenin and its 6’-caffeate; flavonoids (apigenin, scutellarin, luteolin and their glycosides)a bitter constituent, and tannin

**Properties:** aperitive, stimulant, bechic, alterative, expectorant and diuretic

**Medicinal Uses:** A tea made from the leaves is used to relieve complaints of the respiratory tract and in cases of obstinate skin diseases. The leaves have been employed in the treatment of pectoral and nephritic complaints, hemorrhages, skin diseases and the treatment of wounds. Externally, it is used to wash boils and to treat acne. A balsam made from 250 ml juice, 250 ml alcohol decanted after 24 hours and mixed with 250 g ethyl alcohol and 100 g rosewater, is used for contusions, abrasions, scalds and acne. In a decoction: 1 flowering stem in 1 cup water helps to treat edema, digestive discomfort and over the long term, chronic skin disorders.

A springtime tonic of 1 cup slightly acidic white wine and 1 ¾ oz whole, fresh speedwell…chop the plant in a food processor, combine with the wine and let stand for 1 month, shaking the container every 2 or 3 days. Strain. Consume over the course of a year. In the event of sluggish digestion, intestinal insufficiency or eczema, take 1 tsp before each meal.

**Culinary Uses:** A bitter tangy tea is made from the fresh flowering herb or the dried leaves. The dried leaves can be added to tea blends. Many people eat it raw in a salad in early spring or added to soup.

**References**
Plants for a Future Database

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