CHICKWEED

*Stellaria media*
[stell-AR-ee-uh MEED-ee-uh]
*(S. dichotoma—China)*

**Family:** Caryophyllaceae

**Names:** starweed, starwort, tongue grass, winter weed, passerina, chick wittles, clucken wort, skirt buttons, stitchwort; satinflower; white bird’s-eye, adders mouth, Indian chickweed, tongue weed, Qoqobala; yin chai hu (Chinese); stellaire, langue d’oiseau, mouron blanc (French); Augentrosgräs. Vogelmiere (German); stellaria, budelina, paperina, centone (Italian); cam out, serçe dili (Turkish)

**Description:** Fast-growing clump-forming or sprawling annual with weak branching straggling stems up to 18 inches long, each with a single line of longitudinal hairs. Small soft, oval fleshy leaves, long-stalked and yellowish-green, and tiny white flowers with separate thin petals at any time.

**Cultivation:** Seldom necessary as plants self-seed themselves freely especially in dry weather. Prefers moist soil in sun or shade. Harvest throughout the growing period. Use fresh as juice or poultices and fresh or dried in infusions, liquid extracts, medicated oils, ointments, and tinctures.

**History:** Seeds found in Neolithic burial sites. Used as an ancient pot herb. Traditionally fed to domestic birds and fowls. The Latin name, *Stellaria*, came from the Swedish botanist Linnaeus, who noted the starlike shape of the delicate white flowers. The flowers open on sunny days, but they may close on rainy or cloudy days. Chickens, hogs and rabbits dote on its succulent, foliage and seeds, but it is said that sheep and goats won’t touch it. Folk reputation as a slimming herb probably due to its diuretic effect. The common name comes from the old custom of using the seeds as birdfeed. Chickweed elixir brings piece of mind and raises consciousness, thereby allowing sound choices to be made. It stimulates the libido and increases fertility.

**Constituents:** mucilage, triterpenoid saponins, coumarins, carboxylic acids, silica, minerals, vitamins A, B, C, fatty acids

**Properties:** astringent, antirheumatic, heals wounds, demulcent

**Energetics:** sweet, bitter, moist, cool

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

**Medicinal Uses:** Historically used to treat both internal and external inflammations. Poultice of stems and leaves used to ease arthritis and pains of the joints, cuts, and skin irritations. It may soothe severe itchiness and is often used to relieve eczema, varicose veins and nettle rash. An infusion of the fresh or dried plant may be added to a bath, where the herb’s emollient
properties will help reduce inflammation, in rheumatic joints for example, and encourage tissue repair. It may be taken internally to treat chest ailments and in small quantities, it also aids digestion. The saponins in chickweed are poorly absorbed through the intestinal walls, but apparently increase the permeability of the mucous membranes sufficiently to produce expectorant effects on the throat and increase the absorption of nutrients, especially minerals, from the digestive tract. The root of *S. dichotoma* is used in China as a cooling herb in fevers and to stop nosebleeds and heavy menstrual bleeding. It is also given as a tonic for malnourished children.

**REMEDIES:**

**Decoction** (Aerial parts): use the herb fresh, for a cleansing, tonic mixture to relieve tiredness and debility. Also helpful for urinary tract inflammations, such as cystitis.

**Tincture:** add to remedies for rheumatism

**Poultice:** Apply the fresh plant to boils and abscesses and to painful rheumatic joints.

**Compress:** soak a pad in the hot decoction, or tincture diluted in hot water, and apply to painful joints

**Cream:** apply to eczema, especially if it is itching. Use to draw insect stings or splinters and on burns and scalds.

**Infused Oil.** Apply as an alternative to creams for skin rashes or add 1 Tbsp to bathwater for eczema.

**Decoction** (Root of *S. dichotoma*) Use for hot fevers related to weakness in chronic illness.

**Fresh Herbal Vaginal Pack** (useful for many women with class I Pap smears) Take a handful of fresh chickweed, fresh calendula flowers and fresh plantain leaves. Macerate them in a blender with ¼ teaspoon of goldenseal powder. Place the macerated herbs into a diaphragm and insert into the vagina. Leave in overnight. Carefully take out in the morning and gently douche with warm water if you feel there are herbs still inside. Try one night on, one night off, for several weeks.

**Chickweed Salve**

2 parts Chickweed, 2 parts Plantain, 1 part Comfrey Leaf, Olive oil, Beeswax, Tincture of Benzoin or Vitamin E. Notes - If 1 part equals 1/3 cup then you will need 12 - 14 ounces of oil and about 1 ounce of beeswax. Use this salve to soothe itching caused by insect bites and rashes, and to aid healing of minor skin irritations.

**Directions for Making Salve**

These recipes require you to use parts rather than a specific volume of each herb. This technique allows you to easily adapt the recipe. If you want a small amount of salve you can choose one tablespoon as your part, if you want a large amount of salve you might choose 1/2 - 1 cup as your part. The amount of oil needed is enough to completely cover the herbs, plus an inch of oil above the level of the herbs. The tricky part of this is determining exactly how much beeswax is needed to harden the salve. You can approximate the proportions based on the following equivalents. One pint of oil will need about 1½ ounces of beeswax, or one ounce of oil will need about ½ teaspoon of beeswax. There are about 5 teaspoons of beeswax in an ounce. If you intend to make your salve using freshly collected plants, you will want to clean them. Do this by shaking them to remove dirt then spread the herbs out to allow them to air dry for several hours (until wilted) to reduce the moisture content. Fresh chickweed, for example, contains a lot of moisture and this water content could cause your salve to spoil quickly.

To begin your salve, measure the desired amount of herbs into an enamel or stainless steel pan, or into a crock pot. Cover the herbs with oil. Use enough oil to cover the herbs plus another inch of oil above the level of herbs. Heat the herbs and oil over a low heat for several hours (about 3 hours). If you are using roots you should heat the oil longer (about 5 hours). I strongly encourage you to use a crock pot for heating your oil because it operates at a controlled low temperature which is less likely to be a fire hazard. If you don’t use a crock pot then use a double boiler.
After heating, cool your oil for a while. Set up a strainer lined with cheesecloth then pour the oil through to strain. When most of the oil has filtered through the cheesecloth, pick up the cheesecloth, keeping the herbs enclosed, and squeeze as much oil as possible from the herbs and cloth.

Add beeswax to the oil and heat it until all the wax is melted. To test to see if your salve is hard enough, put some on a spoon and set it in a cool place for a few minutes. If your salve is too soft, add more beeswax. If you are using essential oils, Tincture of Benzoin, or Vitamin E, you can blend them in now. Finally, pour your salve into containers and label.

**Homeopathy:** Homeopaths use *Stellaria media* in low potencies for conditions of low metabolism, rheumatism, psoriasis, enlarged and painful liver, and constipation or alternating constipation and diarrhea. All symptoms are worse in the morning and are aggravated by warmth and tobacco.

**Cosmetic Uses:**
*Complexion Lotion:* A handful of the fresh herb, with 1 oz of ground ivy or wood sage infused in a pint of boiling water will, if applied to the face and neck when cool, take away spots and pimples.

**Household Uses:** as a dye plant
*Dye:* 1 pot chickweed
¼ Tbsp logwood powder
1 lb wool-mordanted with copper

Gather a nice big pot of chickweed, the bigger the better. Cover it with water, boil it for an hour and strain out the plant material. Add enough water to make 4 gallons. Add the logwood powder and stir well. Enter the wet copper-mordanted wool and stir. Simmer it for an hour, cool and rinse. Alum-mordanted wool will give you an interesting shade of lilac grey, and chrome a darker shade of the same hue. Color: blue


Chickweed is an herb of love and is worn or imbibed to attract or improve a relationship. This herb is useful when working with lunar magick. It is an ideal herbe for birds and is a suitable patron herbe for those who work animal magick, particularly the healing of birds. Herb of the Moon.

**Emotional Uses:** Being a water herb, chickweed is particularly appropriate for thin, dry and brittle people, who lack the flowing qualities of water, its compassion and receptivity. Drink a tea – 1 cup in the morning- for 14 days and then stop. If you feel you need to continue, wait fourteen days and then repeat the process. Chickweed should not be taken by people who have very watery natures, who are phlegmatic in temperament, where boundaries need to be strengthened rather than broken down.

**Culinary Uses:** Only the young tender stems and leaves should be picked since the greens are at their best during this stage. Chickweed can be eaten raw in salads and sandwiches. Chopped it can be added to chicken or egg salads. A pinch of chickweed on a cold soup or salmon mousse makes an attractive summer garnish. First steamed, it can also be used as a filling for omelets or a stuffing for fish or fowl. It makes an excellent pot herb when cooked in a small amount of water. Chickweed can be frozen and used in any recipe that requires cooking. Frozen chickweed is best used within 6 months.

**Recipes:**
**Mesclun**
2 cups chickweed
1 cup orpine
1 cup parsley
1 cup watercress
1 cup chervil

Vinaigrette
¼ cup olive oil
2 Tbsp lemon juice
2 tsp prepared hot mustard
salt
pepper  
Combine salad greens. Combine ingredients of the vinaigrette. Mix well. Pour over salad and toss. (The Wild Food Gourmet)

Chickweed and Sauerkraut
3 cups chickweed greens  
½ cup onion, sliced  
1 Tbsp margarine  
1 lb jar sauerkraut, drained.

Sauté onions in margarine until delicately browned. Add sauerkraut, cover and simmer gently ½ hour. Stir in chickweed greens and heat through. Serves 6. (How to Prepare Common Wild Foods)

Chickweed Russian Sandwiches
½ cup cream cheese, softened  
¼ cup black olives, chopped  
¼ cup pimento, chopped  
¼ cup mayonnaise  
2 cups chickweed greens, chilled  
Boston brown bread, thinly sliced

Mix olives and pimento with mayonnaise. Spread bread with cream cheese, then mayonnaise mixture. Top with chickweed, then slice of buttered bread. Makes 4-6 sandwiches. (How to Prepare Common Wild Foods)

Orange and Chickweed Meatballs
1 lb hamburger  
½ cup onion, grated  
½ tsp each salt, pepper and cinnamon  
¼ cup margarine  
2 cups chickweed, chopped  
1 cup water  
1 tsp instant beef bouillon  
1 cup orange juice  
¼ cup lemon juice  
1 Tbsp flour  
¼ cup pine nuts, lightly toasted  
hot cooked rice

Mix meat with onion and seasonings. Shape into small meatballs and brown well in margarine melted in a large skillet. Remove meatballs from skillet and keep warm in oven. Cook 10 minutes, stirring frequently. Return meatballs to skillet, add water and bouillon, then simmer 15 minutes. Add orange and lemon juice with flour blended in. Simmer an additional 15 minutes. Serve over hot rice and sprinkle with nuts. Serves 6 (How to Prepare Common Wild Foods)

Chickweed Pie
8 oz chickweed  
2 tsp salt  
8 oz shortcrust pastry  
8 oz cottage cheese  
1 Tbsp salad oil  
2 eggs  
pepper to taste

Put the chopped chickweed in a bowl and sprinkle with the salt. Mix well by hand or with salad servers and leave for an hour or so. Roll out the pastry very thinly and use about two-thirds to line a lightly greased baking tin 10 inches in diameter. Leave to chill in the refrigerator with the left-over piece. Press the chickweed well in a sieve to remove any moisture and put in a bowl with the cheese, oil, one of the eggs, well beaten and ground black pepper to taste. Mix together very well. Put in the prepared tin, roll out the rest of the pastry and cover the mixture, damping and sealing the edges. Make several cuts in the top of the pie. Beat the other egg and use for brushing the top. Bake at 400F for about 45 minutes or until the pastry is browned and the chickweed cooked. Serve hot with potatoes and young carrots. (Food from the Countryside)

Strong Bones Cordial
3 parts chickweed (fresh if possible)  
3 parts horsetail  
3 parts nettles  
3 parts wild oats  
3 parts plantain leaves  
3 parts rose hips  
2 parts fresh malva leaves and stems  
2 parts yellow dock root  
2 parts red clover blossoms  
1 part raspberries, fresh or frozen  
1 part cherries, fresh or dried  
1 part dandelion leaves  
1 part sliced fresh organic oranges or tangerines  
apple cider vinegar
unsulfured blackstrap molasses

Place all herbs and fruit into a widemouthed jar. Cover with twice as much apple cider vinegar. Cover top of jar with plastic wrap (to prevent rising of the lid) and secure lid. Shake daily for 2-4 weeks. Strain well, squeezing all liquid possible out of the herbs. Compost herbs and rebottle the cordial Sweeten the cordial with 2-3 cups unsulfured blackstrap molasses per quart of cordial. Take 2-3 tablespoons per day. You can also mix the dose into ½ cup hot water for a “toddy.” (Healing Tonics)

Stir-Fried Sweet and Sour Fish with Chickweed and Calendula

1-2 Tbsp sunflower oil
6-8 scallions, sliced diagonally
2-3 garlic cloves, crushed
1 inch fresh ginger root, grated
1 lb fresh white fish (sole, cod, etc)
3 Tbsp flowering chickweed
2 Tbsp calendula petals

Sauce
1 ½ Tbsp cornstarch
2-3 Tbsp wine vinegar
1 ½ Tbsp tomato paste
1 ½ Tbsp soy sauce
3 Tbsp orange juice
2 Tbsp soft dark brown sugar

Chinese noodles or boiled rice, to serve

First make the sauce. Blend the cornstarch with vinegar to taste, then stir in the tomato paste and finally all the other ingredients. Heat the oil in a wok over high heat until smoking. Add the onions, garlic and ginger and stir-fry for 1-2 minutes. Flake the fish or cut it into small pieces and add to the wok, together with half the flowers. Stir –fry for 1 minute, then pour in the sauce and cook for a further 2 minutes. Serve piping hot on a bed of Chinese noodles or rice and garnish with the remaining chickweed and calendula petals. (Cooking with Flowers)

Chickweed Soup

2 large bunches chickweed
3 pints chicken stock
6 scallions, white and green parts, thinly sliced
1 large potato, peeled and diced
salt and pepper to taste
1 cup half-and-half

Trim the chickweed of any damaged leaves and tough stems; wash in cold water and dry in a salad spinner or with paper towels. Reserve a few sprigs for garnishing. Put the stock into a large, heavy saucepan and bring to boiling point. Immediately lower the heat and add the scallions, potato, and chickweed. Simmer, covered, for 10 to 15 minutes. Do not cook longer or the soup will lose its flavor. Add the salt and pepper, then puree the soup in a blender. Return it to the saucepan and stir in the half-and-half. Heat the soup through but do not let it boil. Garnish with the reserved sprigs of chickweed and serve hot. Just as good served cold and freezes well too. (Wild Foods)

Chickweed and Mustard Greens

1 quart chickweed (leaves & stems)
½ quart mustard greens (one of the more pungent mustards is recommended)
1 ramp, diced (small onion can be substituted)
2 Tbsp butter
salt
½ cup bacon pieces or grated cheese

Boil the mustard greens in 2 quarts of water for 10 minutes. Add the chickweed and boil for 2 more minutes. Drain and chop the greens. Mix in the diced ramp or onion. Season with salt and butter. Sprinkle with bacon pieces or grated cheese. (Wild Plant Cookbook)

References: