

Common Chickweed

STELLARIA MEDIA



HABITAT

Waste and cultivated ground, preferring richer soils and disturbed ground.

PARTS USED

Leaves and young stems / sprigs.

Gardeners and allotment holders are probably too well aware of this weed which is found virtually everywhere in Britain. A low-lying, straggling and sprawling plant, chickweed is also found almost all year round, producing up to 4 or 5 generations a year in the right conditions.

Chickweed is an annual plant, and although it generally is small in stature the stems can reach up to 30cm in length. It's a plant which needs turned or disturbed ground for the seeds to germinate, and it's highly unlikely you will ever find it amongst grassy and areas of dense low-lying vegetation. The little soft green leaves are oval or elliptical, and when young these (and their thin stems) make a good salad item, or may be cooked. Older plants produce dreadfully chewy foliage and it's really not worth the effort of picking and consuming them.

Chickweed contains calcium, potassium and saponins and has been used as a foodstuff by both man and beast, or rather chickens, for a VERY long time. Because of the saponin content it is perhaps advisable not to eat raw chickweed in very large quantities or too frequently.

Consumption of wild plants is at the reader's discretion and own risk. For personal safety do not eat wild plants if you have a medical condition, during pregnancy, or feed to minors.

WHEN TRYING ONE OF THE WILD PLANTS LISTED FOR THE FIRST TIME, TRY TASTING JUST A SMALL AMOUNT OF THE PREPARED PLANT TO CHECK YOUR TOLERANCE. IF YOU HAVE ANY BAD OR ALLERGIC REACTIONS AVOID ANY FURTHER CONSUMPTION. NEVER PUT ANY PLANT INTO YOUR MOUTH UNLESS ABSOLUTELY 100% CERTAIN OF ITS IDENTIFICATION AND EDIBILITY.

CHICKEN & CHICKWEED SOUP

Chickweed
1/2-1 pint chicken [or other] stock
Flour or cornflour [optional]
Cream

Yes, it's time to embarrass the locals again and go a-gathering chickweed. What must they think of you by now?

- Since chickweed has a delicate flavour and also requires very little cooking, place in a pan with a small knob of butter and wilt the leaves - which will take about 2 minutes. You will need several good handfuls of the greens as chickweed shrinks in volume when cooked.
- In a separate pan place the stock. • Bring to the boil then turn down the heat.
- Add the wilted chickweed [or just add the leaves raw] and stir in a good dollop of cream. Serve.

VARIATIONS

For a thicker soup add the thickening agent to the stock before you bring it to the boil, and maintain the heat until it has cooked before combining with the chickweed. Chicken stock could be replaced by stock made from any other meat leftovers and bones recently prepared. For a more spicy alternative to the chicken soup try seasoning with a little ginger, nutmeg, paprika or turmeric.

[Recipe extract from 'The *Really* Wild Food Guide' - ISBN 0 9544158 0 9]

CHICKWEED, APPLE & RAISIN SALAD

1 tbsp. raisins [or sultanas]
Water
1 apple - diced
Ground cinnamon - pinch
Butter or oil
1-2 handfuls chickweed

Apple and raisins, and apples and dates are taste combinations which are well suited to each other. So here is a simple spiced up version with some chickweed greens.

- Soak the raisins in hot water for about 10 minutes. • Heat a little butter in a skillet and gently warm through the apple pieces, adding a pinch of cinnamon.
- Put the chickweed in a bowl. • Drain the raisins and add. • Then add the apples and juices from the pan and mix everything thoroughly. • Serve with some couscous or rice perhaps.

[Recipe from 'The *Essential* Nettle, Dandelion, Thistle & Chickweed Cookbook' - ISBN 0 9544158 1 7]

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