Common Chickweed

STELLARIA MEDIA

Virtually no corner of Britain remains untouched by that sprawling little plant chickweed. Found almost all year round. Normally the only folks who really give chickweed a second glance are eagle-eyed gardeners since the plant spreads rapidly, requiring copious weeding.

The plant is weak and straggly and yet it has medicinal properties. Made into a poultice it was once used to help heal wounds, skin irritations and inflammation. In Culpepper’s day it was ‘boyled with Hogs-Greas’ to make an ointment, and one old herbal pronounces that ‘the juice taken inwardly is good against the scurvy’.

The Latin name for the plant, Stellaria, means ‘little star’ while media refers to ‘middle’, there being other chickweeds and related species.

Technically chickweed belongs to the Caryophyllaceae family and is an annual plant. With sprawling stems, sometimes up to 30 cm, it likes moist, disturbed, cultivated and waste ground. Flowering virtually all year round - hence its prolific spreading capacity - the soft green leaves are oval or elliptical and are placed in opposite pairs. Lower leaves are stalked while those at the upper part of the stems are not.

Chickweed contains calcium, potassium and saponins and has been used as a foodstuff by both man and beast, or rather chickens. Saponins, however, are potentially poisonous judging from what the author has managed to research on the internet, so it is perhaps advisable not to eat raw chickweed in very large quantities.

[Taken from ‘The Essential Nettle, Dandelion, Thistle & Chickweed Cookbook’ by Johnny Jumbalaya.]

HABITAT
Waste and cultivated ground, preferring richer soils.

PARTS USED
Leaves and young stems.

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.
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 extract from 'The Essential Nettle, Dandelion, Thistle & Chickweed Cookbook'.]

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