

Capsella bursa-pastoris

[Synonyms : *Bursa abscissa*, *Bursa alandica*, *Bursa anglica*, *Bursa astoris*, *Bursa batavorum*, *Bursa belgica*, *Bursa bremensis*, *Bursa brittonii*, *Bursa bursa-pastoris*, *Bursa bursa-pastoris* var. *bifida*, *Bursa bursa-pastoris* var. *heteris*, *Bursa bursa-pastoris* var. *integrifolia*, *Bursa bursa-pastoris* var. *minor*, *Bursa bursa-pastoris* var. *rhomboidea*, *Bursa bursa-pastoris* var. *simplex*, *Bursa bursa-pastoris* var. *tenuis*, *Bursa concava*, *Bursa divaricata*, *Bursa djurdjurae*, *Bursa druceana*, *Bursa fracticruris*, *Bursa gallica*, *Bursa germanica*, *Bursa gracilis*, *Bursa grossa*, *Bursa heegeri*, *Bursa hiatula*, *Bursa integrella*, *Bursa laevigata*, *Bursa mediterranea*, *Bursa nana*, *Bursa occidentalis*, *Bursa occidentalis* var. *concava*, *Bursa occidentalis* subsp. *madeirae*, *Bursa orientalis*, *Bursa origo*, *Bursa pastoris*, *Bursa patagonica*, *Bursa penarthae*, *Bursa pergrossa*, *Bursa robusta*, *Bursa sinuosa*, *Bursa sublaevigata*, *Bursa trevirorum*, *Bursa turoniensis*, *Bursa viguieri*, *Bursa viminalis*, *Capsella abscissa*, *Capsella acutifolia*, *Capsella aestivalis*, *Capsella agrestis*, *Capsella agrestis-rubella*, *Capsella alandica*, *Capsella algida*, *Capsella alpestris*, *Capsella altissima*, *Capsella amblodes*, *Capsella angermannica*, *Capsella anglica*, *Capsella angustiloba*, *Capsella apetala*, *Capsella austriaca*, *Capsella autumnalis*, *Capsella batavorum*, *Capsella belgica*, *Capsella bicuspis*, *Capsella bifida*, *Capsella biformis*, *Capsella bottnica*, *Capsella bremensis*, *Capsella brevisiliqua*, *Capsella brittonii*, *Capsella bursa*, *Capsella bursa* subsp. *pastoris*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris* forma *aestivalis*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris* forma *arachnoidea*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris* forma *attenuata*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris* var. *auriculata*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris* var. *brachycarpa*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris* subsp. *bursa-pastoris*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris* var. *coreana*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris* var. *coronopifolia*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris* forma *coronopus*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris* forma *crassior*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris* subsp. *eu-bursa*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris* var. *integrifolia*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris* var. *minuta*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris* subsp. *occidentalis*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris* forma *orbicularis*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris* var. *pinnata*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris* var. *pinnatifida*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris* forma *prionophylla*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris* forma *prostrata*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris* forma *rhomboidea*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris* var. *rubella*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris* var. *rubriflora*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris* forma *serrata*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris* forma *setchelliana*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris* forma *simplex*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris* forma *treleaseana*, *Capsella bursa-pastoris* forma *ventosa*, *Capsella calmariensis*, *Capsella caucasica*, *Capsella cavata*, *Capsella collina*, *Capsella compacta*, *Capsella concava*, *Capsella convexiformis*, *Capsella cordata*, *Capsella cordigera*, *Capsella coronopus*, *Capsella cuneiformis*, *Capsella cuneolata*, *Capsella curvisiliqua*, *Capsella cuspidata*, *Capsella dentata*, *Capsella denticulata*, *Capsella difformis*, *Capsella diodonta*, *Capsella divaricata*, *Capsella druceana*, *Capsella elegans*, *Capsella emarginata*, *Capsella erecta*, *Capsella exotica*, *Capsella faucialis*, *Capsella foliosa*, *Capsella frigida*, *Capsella fucorum*, *Capsella furcata*, *Capsella galicica*, *Capsella gallica*, *Capsella germanica*, *Capsella gothica*, *Capsella gotlandica*, *Capsella gracilescens*, *Capsella gracilis*, *Capsella grossa*, *Capsella grossotriangularis*, *Capsella hanseatica*, *Capsella heegeri*, *Capsella helsingica*, *Capsella herjedalica*, *Capsella hians*, *Capsella hiatula*, *Capsella hiemalis*, *Capsella humilis*, *Capsella hyrcana*,

Capsella incisura, *Capsella integrella*, *Capsella integrifolia*, *Capsella jemtlandica*, *Capsella jeniseiensis*, *Capsella kyphosa*, *Capsella lacerata*, *Capsella laevigata*, *Capsella lanceolatocaspica*, *Capsella lata*, *Capsella latisiliqua*, *Capsella laxa*, *Capsella lenaensis*, *Capsella leptoloba*, *Capsella linearis*, *Capsella lingulata*, *Capsella lobulata*, *Capsella longiracemosa*, *Capsella longirostris*, *Capsella longisiliqua*, *Capsella lulensis*, *Capsella lutetiana*, *Capsella macroclada*, *Capsella matura*, *Capsella mediterranea*, *Capsella microcarpa*, *Capsella monasterialis*, *Capsella nanella*, *Capsella nylandica*, *Capsella obovata*, *Capsella obtusa*, *Capsella odontophylla*, *Capsella oelandica*, *Capsella origo*, *Capsella oviculata*, *Capsella ovifera*, *Capsella pastoralis*, *Capsella pastoris*, *Capsella patagonica*, *Capsella penarthaë*, *Capsella perconcava*, *Capsella perdentata*, *Capsella pergrossa*, *Capsella perhians*, *Capsella perversa*, *Capsella pinnata*, *Capsella pinnatifolia*, *Capsella poimenobalantion*, *Capsella polymorpha*, *Capsella praecox*, *Capsella praematura*, *Capsella prionophylla*, *Capsella provincialis*, *Capsella querceti*, *Capsella ramselensis*, *Capsella rhenana*, *Capsella rhombea*, *Capsella robusta*, *Capsella rubella*, *Capsella rubelliformis*, *Capsella rubelloagrestis*, *Capsella rubiginosa*, *Capsella ruderalis*, *Capsella sabulosa*, *Capsella salinula*, *Capsella savonica*, *Capsella scanica*, *Capsella scoliocaspica*, *Capsella segetum*, *Capsella seleniaca*, *Capsella semilobata*, *Capsella semirubella*, *Capsella sinuatolinearis*, *Capsella sinuosa*, *Capsella smolandica*, *Capsella stenocarpa*, *Capsella subalgida*, *Capsella subalpina*, *Capsella subarctica*, *Capsella subbergiana*, *Capsella subcanescens*, *Capsella subcavata*, *Capsella subseleniaca*, *Capsella tenella*, *Capsella tenera*, *Capsella tenerescens*, *Capsella tibelensis*, *Capsella tjustiana*, *Capsella trevirorum*, *Capsella triangularis*, *Capsella turoniensis*, *Capsella umensis*, *Capsella ursina*, *Capsella varia*, *Capsella vestrogothica*, *Capsella viaria*, *Capsella viarum*, *Capsella viguieri*, *Capsella viminalis*, *Capsella virgata*, *Capsella viridis*, *Crucifera capsella*, *Iberis bursa-pastoris*, *Lepidium bursa-pastoris*, *Nasturtium bursa-pastoris*, *Solmsiella heegeri*, *Thlaspi bursa-pastoris*, *Thlaspi rubellum*]

SHEPHERD’S PURSE is an annual (occasionally biennial). Native to Europe it has tiny white flowers.

It is also known as Bad man’s oatmeal, *Beursje* (Dutch), Blindweed, *Bolsa de pastor* (Spanish), *Bolsa do pastor* (Portuguese), *Borsa di pastore* (Italian), *Borsapastore comune* (Italian), *Bourse* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), *Bourse à Judas* (French), *Bourse à Pasteur* (French), *Bourse de capucin* (French), *Capselle à Pasteur* (French), *Capselle bourse à Pasteur* (French), Case-weed, Casewort, Chinese cress, *Clappedepouch* (Irish Gaelic), Cocowort, Common shepherd’s purse, *Coratente* (Nepalese), Crowpecks, *Erva do bom pastor* (Portuguese), Fat hen, *Fleur de St. Jacques* (French), *Gargir il-gemel* (Maltese), Gentleman’s purse, *Gemeine Hirtentäschelkraut* (German), *Gewöhnliches Hirtentäschel* (German), *Gewoon herderstasje* (Dutch), Guns, Hen pepper, Hens and chickens, *Herders tasje* (Dutch), *Herderstassie* (Afrikaans), *Hirtentäschchen* (German), *Hirtentäschel* (German), *Hirtentäschelkraut* (German), *Hyrdetaske* (Danish), *Ji* (Chinese), *Ji cai* (Chinese), *Kapsička pastierska* (Slovak), *Kokoška pastuší tobolka* (Czech), Lady’s purse, *Ling jiao cai* (Chinese), *Lomme* (Swedish), *Lommeört* (Swedish), *Lutukka* (Finnish), *Mastuerzo* (Spanish), *Molette à berger* (French), Money bags, Mother’s heart, *Naeng-i* (Korean), Naughty man’s plaything, *Nazuna* (Japanese), Old woman’s bonnet, *Paniquesillo* (Spanish), *Pan y quesito blanco* (Spanish), *Pastierska kapsička obyčejná* (Slovak), *Penpen gusa* (Japanese), Pepper and salt, Pepper and shot, Pepper grass, Pepper plant, Pepper weed, Pickpocket, Pickpocket to London, Pick-cup purse, Pickpurse, Pick-your-mother’s-heart-out, *Pi d'mouissaon* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), Poor man’s parmacettie, Poor man’s pharmaceutic, Poor man’s purse, Poverty purse, Purseflower, *Pwrs y Bugail* (Welsh), Rattle pouches, Rifle the ladies’ purses, Sack

of the priest, St. James' weed, Sanguinary, *Seisai* (Japanese), *Shamisen gusa* (Japanese), *Shepaazupaasu* (Japanese), Shepard's bag, Shepard's pouch, Shepard's purse, Shepherd's bag, Shepherd's heart, Shepherd's pedlar, Shepherd's pocket, Shepherd's pouch, Shepherd's scrip, Shepherd's sprout, Shovelweed, Snake flower, Stony-in-the-wall, Tacker weed, *Täschelkraut* (German), Toothwort, *Torii ghaans* (Nepalese), Toy weed, Toywort, Windflower, Witch's pouches, and *Zurrón de pastor* (Spanish); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of 'I offer you my all'.

The plant flowers and fruits throughout the year, and one plant can produce as many as 50,000 seeds annually – seeds that can remain viable for several years.

Warning – it is alleged by some that shepherd's purse can be poisonous.

Bursa-pastoris means 'shepherd's purse' with reference to the shape of the fruit and the purses or pouches that used to be worn hanging from the belt by cord or string.

Those purses or pouches are reflected in most of the common names adopted throughout Europe.

The reason for a couple of the common names is of particular interest. The amount of space the plant can take up on valuable land is said to have led to the name Pickpocket. While *Clappedepouch* is an Irish name that refers to the lepers who were often called 'rattle-pouches' and were licensed to beg. They carried a bell or clapper and a brass cup on the end of a long pole (for alms) and would often be found waiting at crossroads.

The Norsemen introduced the plant to Greenland in the late 9th Century and, to this day, it can still be found in the same place that it was originally planted.

A superstition associated particularly with northern England claimed that if you opened the pod and found yellow seeds you would be rich and if they were green you would be poor.

A sad little game that used to be played by some European children, including the English and the Germans, relies on the easily broken seed cases. A child is urged to choose one of several seed cases and as soon as this breaks is told that he has broken his mother's heart.

In some parts of Europe the root has been used as a hot-tasting flavouring and the seeds have been ground for bread flour. Shepherd's purse, both wild and cultivated (the latter in China), has provided a green vegetable in several Asian countries. Koreans eat the boiled leaves with a special sauce and buy the wild plant complete with its long white tap root. It seems to have attracted particular popularity in China during the reign of the Sung dynasty (960-1279) when it was an ingredient in a traditional soup – and today it can still be found for sale in markets in southern China. In the West the tender young leaves can be added to salad, sautéed or steamed and used as an ingredient in sauces, soups and stews.

One of its fascinating qualities, shared with only a few other plants, is that it is believed to be slightly radioactive when fresh. It is contended by some people therefore that shepherd's purse can help to relieve pain purely by its touch on the afflicted area.

In veterinary medicine it was used to treat calves for purging. The seeds are enjoyed by caged and wild birds, particularly chaffinches.

Many of the North American Indian tribes absorbed shepherd's purse into their diet. For the Mendocino Indians the seeds were a staple food, whereas for some of the Apache tribe they provided flavouring. The Cherokee also used shepherd's purse as a spice – and like the Cahuilla, some of the Apache and the Thompson tribes they ate the leaves as a vegetable. Some of the Apache also ground the dried seeds for bread-flour.

The North American Menominee Indian tribe, and no doubt others, believed that a wash with the infused liquid obtained from steeping shepherd's purse in water was a particularly valuable remedy for poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*) sores. The Chippewa and Mohican Indians used the plant to treat some stomach disorders, and the former together with the Mahuna and Costanoan tribes used it especially as a remedy for dysentery. The

Mahuna seem to have found the plant useful for treating diarrhoea and the Meskwaki tribe also used it. The Mohicans prescribed it for expelling worms. Chippewa Indians used the leaves in remedies for headaches.

Apparently shepherd's purse played a significant role in genetic research earlier in the 20th Century at Princeton University, New Jersey in the United States. This was carried out under Professor George H. Shull (1874-1954) and focussed on the principles underlying hybrid corn development.

Shepherd's purse is used commercially in cosmetic preparations, proprietary medicines and homoeopathic remedies.

It was one of the at least 36 ingredients used by Mithridates (c.132-63 BC), the 1st Century King of Pontus (northern Turkey), in a poison antidote (known as Antidotum Mithridaticum or Theriac) which he took daily to acquire an overall immunity – an important consideration if it is remembered that he gained his position of power by poisoning his opposition.

Medicinally, herbalists used shepherd's purse for stemming internal bleeding, as well as for healing wounds. In the early 20th Century, when alternative commercial products were no longer available in Germany during the 1st World War, extracts of the plant were used to stop wounds bleeding. It has also been used in the treatment of ear problems, piles, diarrhoea, dysentery, rheumatic ailments, urinary disorders, haemorrhages, period problems, kidney complaints and fluid retention. [At one time it was thought to be useful in curing jaundice if the plant was tied to the wrists and the soles of the feet.]