

Chenopodium album

[Synonyms : *Anserina candicans*, *Atriplex alba*, *Blitum viride*, *Chenopodium alba*, *Chenopodium albidum*, *Chenopodium album* subsp. *densifoliatum*, *Chenopodium album* subsp. *diversifolium*, *Chenopodium album* subsp. *fallax*, *Chenopodium album* var. *hastatum*, *Chenopodium album* subsp. *ovatum*, *Chenopodium album* var. *polymorphum*, *Chenopodium album* var. *striatiforme*, *Chenopodium album* subsp. *virgatum*, *Chenopodium amaranticolor*, *Chenopodium browneanum*, *Chenopodium centrорubrum*, *Chenopodium giganteum*, *Chenopodium iljinii*, *Chenopodium lanceolatum*, *Chenopodium missouriense*, *Chenopodium probstii*, *Chenopodium reticulatum*, *Chenopodium striatiforme*, *Chenopodium suecicum*, *Chenopodium virgatum*, *Chenopodium viride*, *Chenopodium zobelli*]

FAT-HEN is an annual. Native to northern temperate areas (particularly Europe and North America) it has tiny greenish-white flowers.

It is also known as Allgood, *Ançarinha-branca* (Portuguese), *Anserina-branca* (Portuguese), *Ansérine blanche* (French), *Apazote blanco* (Spanish), *Apazote cenizo* (Spanish), *Armuelle* (Spanish), Bacon weed, *Bathu* (Punjabi), *Bathwa* (Urdu), *Bethu sag* (Bengali, Hindi), Blackweed, *Blianche s'nile* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), *Ceniglo blanco* (Spanish), *Cenizo blanco* (Spanish), *Chénopode blanc* (French), *Chenopodio bianco* (Italian), *Chenopodion to lefkon* (Greek), *Chou gras* (French), Common lambsquarters, Common pigweed, Confetti, Dirtweed, Dirty Dick, Dirty Jack, Dirty John, Dock flower, Dung weed, *Erva-formigueira-branca* (Portuguese), *Falsa erva de Santa Maria* (Portuguese), *Fiss el kelab* (Arabic), Frost blite, *Gänsefuss* (German), *Ghobbejra bajdanija* (Maltese), Goosefoot, *Grasse-poulette* (French), *Guyo blanco* (Argentinian, Spanish), *Gwydd-droed Gwyn* (Welsh), Hen fat, *Hvidmelet gåsefod* (Danish), *Jauhosavikka* (Finnish), *Kitsarius* (Pawnee North American Indian), John O' the Nile, Lamb's quarters, *Li* (Chinese), Magenta lamb's quarters, *Mar' belaiia* (Russian), Mealweed, *Merlík bílý* (Czech), Meldweed, *Melganzevoet* (Dutch), Midden meals, Midden myles, Midden-my-lies, Milds, Miles, *Mjölmålla* (Swedish), Muck hill weed, Muckweed, Mutton chops, Mutton tops, Myles, *Pappu-kura* (Telugu), *Parupukkirai* (Tamil), Pigweed, *Poule grasse* (French), *Praiseach fiadhain* (Irish Gaelic), Probst's goosefoot, Rag Jack, Rag-jag, *Saviheinä* (Finnish), *Shiro za* (Japanese), *Snile* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), *Svinmålla* (Swedish), *Tafod yr Oen* (Welsh), *Taku* (Indian), Tree spinach, *Vastuk* (Sanskrit), *Vitmålla* (Swedish), *Wahpe toto* (Dakota North American Indian), Water goosefoot, *Weisser Gänsefuss* (German), White chenopodium, White goosefoot, Wild spinach, and *Withondebossie* (Afrikaans).

Warning – fat-hen should not be taken internally if suffering from kidney or rheumatic disorders. In large amounts it can cause weakness, fatigue, fluid retention and bloodstained diarrhoea, as well as yellow pigmentation and photosensitivity of the skin. It can be poisonous for animals if grazed excessively.

Album means 'white' with reference to the flowers.

The common name Fat hen is explained by some authorities as a shortening of the 'Henry' of 'good-King-Henry' (*Chenopodium bonus-henricus*).

The leaves are full of nutrition (more than cabbage, *Brassica oleracea* var. *capitata* or spinach, *Spinacia oleracea*) and incredibly, like those of good-King-Henry (*Chenopodium bonus-henricus*), have been eaten from Neolithic times (2700 BC) to the 19th Century. The seeds of fat-hen (one plant can produce 100,000) are rich in fat and albumen and were ground into flour (similar to buckwheat (*Fagopyrum esculentum*) flour in appearance) for gruel and bread.

Fat-hen was not only sustenance for primitive man but records also show that it formed part of the ritualistic last meal given to Tollmund Man who was sacrificed by the Danes in 100 BC and discovered in 1950.

In North America some of the Indian tribes in the south and south-west were well familiar with fat-hen. For instance the Hopi of Arizona cooked the young Spring leaves like spinach (*Spinacia oleracea*), as also did the Menominee tribe further to the north-east and also the Teton Sioux, the Mendocino Indian, Luiseño, Shuswap, Dakota, Miwok, Mohican, Cherokee, Iroquois, Chippewa, Zuni, Diegueño, Kawaiisu, Thompson and Omaha. Although the Kiowa are believed to have picked fat-hen for food in the past, by early in the 20th Century it seems that the plant was of little interest to them. Some tribes, such as the Alaskan Inuit in the north and the Navajo and Apache from the far south, also ate the young leaves raw. The Cherokee, Hopi, Potawatomi and Navajo Indians used them as flavouring in various savoury dishes, and the plant featured as an ingredient in ceremonial dishes prepared by the Navajo. It was used to make soups by the Omaha, Tohono O'Odham, Pawnee and Dakota tribes, and records note that for the Paiute, Montana Indian and Navajo Indians it was a significant part of their diet. Ground seeds were used both for bread flour (especially by the Montana Indian and Navajo tribes) and for gruel (notably by the Hopi and Paiute Indians). As if this were not enough, the Miwok and Navajo Indians and the Alaskan Inuits all stored the dried leaves or the seeds for future use. But American Indian usage appears to have extended beyond culinary requirements.

The Pawnee are supposed to have painted their bows and arrows green with a decoction of the plant.

Meskwaki Indians are thought to have used an infusion of the root to treat some urinary ailments. For several tribes such as some of the Alaskan Inuits and the Navajo and Cherokee Indians, fat hen was considered a valuable plant for a healthy diet and also a digestive aid, while the Potawatomi viewed it as both a preventative agent and cure for scurvy. Iroquois Indians prescribed it for some female problems and as a remedy for diarrhoea, and applied it externally on burns. Some of the Cree tribe used it internally and externally to treat rheumatism, and the Mendocino Indian tribe turned to the leaves for easing stomach-ache.

European settlers on the North American Continent cooked fat-hen as a vegetable (most often like spinach, *Spinacia oleracea*) as they would have done in their homelands.

Fat-hen was also the source of a red dye.

The leaves are highly nutritious and are understood to be a rich source of, for instance, beta-carotene, calcium, iron, potassium and Vitamins such as A, B and C. It is understood that the American Cancer Society believes that a diet consisting of a high content of plants which contain beta-carotene can assist in reducing the risk of contracting some forms of cancer.