

Chenopodium bonus-henricus

[Synonyms : *Blitum bonus-henricus*, *Chenopodium esculentus*, *Orthosporum unctuosum*]

GOOD-KING-HENRY is a perennial. Native to Europe it has tiny greenish-yellow flowers. It is also known as *Algoede ganzevoet* (Dutch), All-good, *Anserina Buen Enrique* (Spanish), *Ansérine Bon-Henri* (French), *Armuelle silvestre* (Spanish), *Aulouoches* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), *Blite*, *Bon Henri* (French), *Bono-enrico* (Italian), *Bono Enrique* (Spanish), *Bonus Henricus*, *Brave Hendrik* (Dutch), *Buono Enrico* (Italian), *Buen armuelle* (Spanish), *Buen Enrique* (Spanish), *Chénopode bon Henri* (French), *Chenopodio o kalos Errikos* (Greek), *Colubrina* (Italian), *Dorf-Gänsefuss* (German), English mercurie, English mercury, *Épinard sauvage* (French), *Farinello Buon Enrico* (Italian), Fat hen, *Fette Henne* (German), *Fetthenne* (German), Flowery docken, Friar's potherb, Good Henry, Good King Harry, Good neighbourhood, Goosefoot, *Guasoncle* (Spanish), *Guter Heinrich* (German), *Heinrichsgänsefuss* (German), *Hoja de alubia* (Spanish), *Hundsmelde* (German), *Hyvänheikinsavikka* (Finnish), Johnny o'Neale, *Kenopodiumu bonesuhenrikusu* (Japanese), *Kikuba akaza* (Japanese), Lamb's quarters, *Lamsoor* (Dutch), Lincolnshire asparagus, Lincolnshire spinach, *Llys y Gwrda* (Welsh), *Lungmålla* (Swedish), *Lungrot* (Swedish), *Marcaram*, *Mar' Dobrogo Genricha* (Russian), *Mar' tsel'nolistnaia* (Russian), Margery, Markery, Markweed, *Mercorella lunga* (Italian), Mercury, Mercury goosefoot, *Merlik všedobr* (Czech), Midden mylies, *Pata de ganso* (Spanish), Perennial goosefoot, Perennial spinach, *Pié de ánade* (Spanish), *Pié de ganso* (Spanish), *Quenopodio* (Spanish), Roman plant, Shoemaker's heels, Smear docken, Smearwort, Smiddy leaves, *Spinachio selvatico* (Spanish), *Stolthenriksgåsefod* (Danish), Tola bona, *Toute-bonne* (French), *Tutta buona* (Italian), *Wilder Mehl-spinat* (German), *Wilder Spinat* (German), Wild spinach, *Zarrones* (Spanish), *Zurrón* (Spanish), and *Zurrones* (Spanish); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of goodness.

Warning – good-King-Henry 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.

Good-King-Henry's appearance can be confused with that of garden orache (*Atriplex hortensis*) or wild amaranth (*Amaranthus blitum*).

Bonus-henricus means 'good Henry', for some authorities a reference to Güter Heinrich, a 16th Century German goblin knowledgeable on healing plants.

The common name probably emerged in Germany where the plant is distinguished from 'Bad Henry', the poisonous mercury plant (*Mercurialis*). The plant's name has no connection with any of the English kings. Jacob Grimm (1785-1863), the elder of the two brothers who together gained international fame from the fairy tales they first published in 1812, is said to have stated that the name *Henricus* refers to kobolds (spirits of the mines, in German folklore) and elves, and its use implies malicious magical powers.

In Germany it was also said to have been used to fatten hens, hence the name *Fette Henne* and the use of its English translation.

It was used as food as far back as Neolithic times – until the 19th Century. Either the young plant was cooked like spinach (*Spinacia oleracea*) (to which it was preferred in many

parts of Britain) or the stems were prepared like garden asparagus (*Asparagus officinalis*). In the 1970s it could have been seen in greengrocers for sale at extortionate prices as a delicacy in London's West End.

Good-King-Henry was also used quite extensively as food for livestock and in veterinary medicine.

Medicinally, it used to be recommended for treating scurvy.