

Glechoma hederacea

[Synonyms : *Glechoma hederacea* var. *micrantha*, *Glechoma hederacea* var. *parviflora*, *Nepeta glechoma*, *Nepeta hederacea*]

GROUND-IVY is a creeping semi-evergreen perennial. Native to northern Asia and to Europe (including Britain), it has small bluish-purple flowers.

It is also known as Ale gill, Alehoof, Bird's eye, Bluebells, Blue runner, Catnip, Cat's foot, Cat's paw, Cat's tail, *Courroie de St.-Jean* (French), Creeping Charlie, Creeping Jenny, Crow's guts, Crow-victuals, Deceiver, Devil's candlestick, *Echte Gundermann* (German), *Edera terrestre* (Italian), *Efeu-Gundermann* (German), *Eidral* (Welsh), *Erba di San Giovanni* (Italian), Fat hen, Field balm, Furn hoof, Gill, Gill ale, Gill-creep-by-the-ground, Gill-go-by-the-hedge, Gill-go-by-the-street, Gill-go-over-the-ground, Gill-over-the-ground, Gillrun, Gill-run-by-the-ground, Gill-run-over-grass, Gill-run-over-the-ground, Gill tea, *Glekomo heredeca* (Esperanto), Ground ivvins, Grundavy, *Gundelrebe* (German), *Gundermann* (German), Hathove, Hay-hoa, Hay foot, Hayhofe, Hayhoof, Hay hove, Haymaids, Hedge maids, Hen and chickens, *Hiedra terrestre* (Spanish), Hove, Jack-over-the-ground, Jenny-run-by-the-ground, Jill- o'er-the-ground, *Jordreva* (Swedish), Joy, *Korsknep* (Danish), *Lierre de terre* (French), *Lierre terrestre* (French), Lion's mouth, Lizzy-run-up-the-hedge, *Maahumala* (Finnish), Monkey-chops, Monkey flower, Moulds, Nep, *Popenec břech'anovitý* (Czech), *Popenec obecny* (Czech), Purple chickweed, Rabbit's mouths, Rat's foot, Rat's mouths, Red-hofe, Robin-runaway, Robin-run-in-the-hedge, Rob-run-up-dyke, Roving Charlie, Runaway Jack, Runaway Nell, Runaway Robin, Runni-dyke, Scarlet runner, Snakeroot, *Tèrrètre* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), Tunfoot, Tunhoof, Turnhoof, Wandering Jenny, Wandering Jew, Wild snakeroot, and *Zádušnik břech'anovitý* (Slovak).

The flowers are pollinated by bees.

Warning – ground ivy can be poisonous for humans if taken in large amounts. Its glandular hairs can cause skin rashes on sensitive skin. It can be poisonous for animals, especially horses.

Hederacea is derived from Latin *hedera* (ivy) meaning 'ivy-like'.

The plant's use in making ale is reflected in the common names including those beginning with 'Gill' which is derived from a French word meaning 'to ferment ale' *guiller*. The plant was used long before hops, *Humulus lupulus* (and in preference to it until the early 1600s) to clarify, flavour and extend the keeping qualities of ale. [The use of ground-ivy and also its eventual successor, hops, had been accepted on the European Continent for clarifying beer long in advance of the British who believed initially that it could be injurious to health.] It was in this connection that ground-ivy acquired the name Tunhoof as the old English word for 'herb' was *hofe* and 'tunning' was the term applied to the mashing and fermenting process during brewing.

Its use in brewing meant that the plant became a familiar sight in cottage gardens and was one of the many sold by the old London streetsellers. In the English town of Ludlow (in the west Midlands) gill-tea was made until relatively recently and it was also traditional there to cook pork stuffed with ground-ivy leaves.

Powdered ground-ivy leaves were used in snuff and the juice was employed in veterinary medicine, particularly to cure horses' eye complaints.

Ground-ivy played its part in some areas of Europe in superstition. It was one of the plants that if formed into the shape of a cross could be relied upon to identify witches.

In North America, where ground-ivy had been introduced by the early settlers, painters used to take frequent wineglasses of a freshly made infusion of the plant both as a preventative and a cure for lead poisoning. The North American Cherokee Indians also adopted it for medicinal purposes. They used it to treat colds, measles and skin rashes on babies.

Medicinally, the properties of ground-ivy have probably been recognized in folk remedies for centuries for treating such problems as inflamed eyes. Records show that Galen (c.130-c.201), the celebrated and well-travelled Greek physician, whose descriptions of botanical drugs were accepted until the Middle Ages, was familiar with some of its medicinal uses. Its popularity in Europe continued over the centuries and in 16th Century England John Gerard (1545-1612), the barber-surgeon and herbalist, also advocated its use for various ills. Not only has ground-ivy been recommended for the treatment of coughs, catarh, colds, indigestion and kidney ailments but also (even in the 20th Century) for headaches, asthma, jaundice and lung infections, as well as the relief of sore throats and, as of old, inflamed eyes.

Today it is mainly used in folk medicine for the internal treatment of piles, bronchitis and catarrh, and externally for soothing inflammation. Ground-ivy is also used fresh in homoeopathic treatments.