

*Prunella vulgaris*

[Synonyms : *Brunella laciniata*, *Brunella vulgaris*, *Prunella caroliniana*, *Prunella incisa*, *Prunella vulgaris major*]

**SELFHEAL** is a semi-evergreen perennial. Native to Asia and Europe (including Britain) it has small violet-purple (occasionally pink or white) flowers.

It is also known as All-heal, *Almindelig Brunelle* (Danish), *Austakhadus* (Punjabi), Blackman's flower, Blue-curds, Blue curls, Blue Lucy, *Braunelle* (German), Brownwort, Brunel, Brunella, *Brunelle commune* (French), *Brunört* (Swedish), Bumble-bees, Caravaun bog, Carpenter's grass, Carpenter's herb, Carpenter's square, Carpenter's weed, *Černohlávek obecný* (Czech), *Černohlávek obyčejný* (Slovak), Common self heal, *Craith Unnos* (Welsh), Cure-all, *Dharu* (Hindi), Dragonhead, Fly-flowers, *Gemeine Brunelle* (German), *Gewone brunel* (Dutch), Heal-all, Heart of the earth, Hearts ease, Herb bennet, Herb carpenter, Hercules all-heal, Hercules woundwort, *Hierba de las heridas* (Spanish), Hock-heal, Hook-heal, Hookweed, *Kleine Braunelle* (German), London bottles, *Niittyhumala* (Finnish), Panay, Pickpocket, Prince's feather, Proud carpenter, Prunella, Sickwort, Slough-heal, Square stem, Thimbleflower, Touch and heal, *Vanlig brunört* (Swedish), Wild sage, Wood sage, Woundwort, and *Y Feddyges Las* (Welsh).

The flowers are pollinated by bees.

*Vulgaris* means 'common'.

Brunella was an old common name for the plant. Its accessibility as a common weed was probably instrumental in its everyday use for stemming bleeding wounds made in the home or in fights which led to some of its other common names.

At some point selfheal reached North America and became familiar to many North American Indian tribes. The Thompson Indians soaked the plant in cold water for the beverage that records indicate was most commonly drunk by them, and the Cherokee ate the leaves as a cooked vegetable.

In veterinary medicine, eye or skin problems experienced by Blackfoot horses could be treated with selfheal.

But authorities indicate that its greatest value lay in human medicinal qualities that were recognised by very many native tribes, including the Catawba. The Iroquois would appear to have employed different parts of selfheal for the widest number of ailments as well as using it to cause vomiting or to act as a sedative. They used it for treating blood diseases, stomach upsets, colds, coughs, some female problems (as did some of the Chippewa tribe), diabetes, various lung disorders, tuberculosis, piles and venereal disease, and they also prescribed it to ease diarrhoea and vomiting. It provided a tonic for the Thompson Indians, some of the Cree tribe used it to ease sore throats, and the Menominee appreciated it as a remedy for dysentery that was especially suitable for babies. For the Delaware, Iroquois, Algonkin and Mohican Indians selfheal could ease fever. The Cherokee tribe applied it to burns – and they also used it as a flavouring for various medicines. A plant infusion provided the Blackfoot with an eyewash, while the Bella Coola tribe used the roots, leaves and flowers for heart problems. Not least selfheal's healing properties were harnessed by several tribes including the Quileute,

some of the Salish, the Blackfoot, Cherokee and Quinault for various skin disorders, particularly boils.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> Century the throat-like shape of the flower encouraged those who believed in the dogma of the Doctrine of Signatures (which contended that alleged resemblance of some part of a plant, to the part of the human body afflicted or to the cause of the affliction, demanded the use of that plant) to employ selfheal in the treatment of throat ailments eg. tonsilitis. It used also to be employed as a remedy for diphtheria and piles. In the West today the plant is used primarily to treat wounds, sores and inflammation while in China it can form part of the treatment given for gout.