

Rumex acetosella

[Synonyms : *Acetosa acetosella*, *Acetosa angiocarpa*, *Acetosella acetosella*, *Acetosella multifida*, *Acetosella tenuifolia*, *Acetosella vulgaris*, *Rumex acetosella* subsp. *angiocarpus*, *Rumex acetosella* var. *pyrenaicus*, *Rumex acetosella* var. *tenuifolius*, *Rumex acetosella* var. *vulgaris*, *Rumex angiocarpus*, *Rumex multifidus*, *Rumex tenuifolius*]

SHEEP'S SORREL is an annual or perennial. Native to temperate Asia and Europe (including Britain) it has tiny green to reddish-brown flowers.

It is also known as *Acedera pequena* (Spanish), *Acetosa minore* (Italian), *Ahosuolaheinä* (Finnish), *Bergssyra* (Swedish), *Bergsyra* (Swedish), *Chukapalam* (Bengali), *Chutrika* (Sanskrit), Common sheep sorrel, Common sorrel, Cow sorrel, Cuckoo bread, Field sorrel, Flora coral sorrel, Gentlemen's sorrel, Green sauce, Horse sorrel, *Kleiner Sauerampfer* (German), *Kyselka menší* (Czech), *Kyselka obecná* (Czech), Mountain sorrel, *Oseille* (French-Canadian), *Petite oseille* (French), *P'tite suthelle* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), Ranty-tanty, Red sorrel, Red-top sorrel, Red weed, Sharp dock, Sour dock, Sour grass, Sour leaf, Sour leek, Sour weed, Sorrel, Sorrel dock, Sower-grass, *Šťovík menší* (Czech), *Suran yr Yd* (Welsh), *Surette* (French-Canadian), Toad's sorrel, Wood dock, and *Y Driongl* (Welsh).

Its flowers are pollinated by the wind.

Warning – sheep's sorrel leaves can cause kidney damage if taken internally in very large doses. It should not be taken internally if suffering from arthritis, some gastric disorders, gout, kidney stones or rheumatism. Handling the leaf can cause dermatitis. Sheep's sorrel can be poisonous for some animals.

Acetosella is derived from Latin *acetum* (vinegar) and is a Latin name for plants with mildly acidic leaves.

The presence of the plant is an indicator of poor soil.

In England sheep's sorrel was probably at the peak of its popularity in the 16th Century when the young shoots were not only an ingredient in sauces, jams and jellies but also used to flavour ale. It gave ground to French sorrel (*Rumex scutatus*) in the early 17th Century.

Sheep's sorrel eventually reached North America and came to be known to several North American Indian tribes as both a source of food and medicine. Records suggest that the leaves were popular with children especially in the Hanaksiala, Hesquiat, Anticosti and Thompson tribes. Iroquois Indians used them to flavour salted cucumber, and like the Cherokee, Bella Coola, Miwok, Okanagan-Colville, Chehalis and Saanich tribes they ate them raw or cooked as a vegetable. Delaware Indians cooked the leaves in pies.

As an internal medicine Mohican Indians chewed the fresh leaves for stomach upsets, and Squaxin Indians ate them as a treatment for tuberculosis. Externally both the Cherokee and Aleut tribes applied leaf and flower or leaf poultices to various skin problems.

Medicinally, the fresh juice of the plant has been used for treating some kidney and urinary disorders. Herbalists have also used the plant to treat tumours and cancer.