

Stellaria media

[Synonyms : *Alsine media*, *Alsinula media*, *Stellaria apetala*, *Stellaria glabra*, *Stellaria hiemalis*, *Stellaria vulgaris*]

COMMON CHICKWEED is an invasive annual or biennial. Possibly native to southern Europe it has small white flowers.

It is also known as Adder's mouth, *Almindelig Fuglegræs* (Danish), *Augentrosgräs* (German), Bindweed, Bird's eye, *Brechlys* (Welsh), *Budelina* (Italian), *Cam otu* (Turkish), *Centone* (German), Chicken's meat, Chickenweed, Chickenwort, Chicknyweed, Chickweed, Chickweed starwort, Chick wittles, Cluckenweed, Cluckenwort, Cluckweed, Clukenwort, *Gänsegras* (German), Garden chickweed, *Gewöhnliche Vogelmiere* (German), *Gewone Sterremuur* (Afrikaans), *Gwlydd y Gwyddau* (Welsh), *Harira bajda* (Maltese), *Herbe à l'oiseau* (French), *Hierba pajarera* (Spanish), *Hühnerdarm* (German), *Hviezdica* (Slovak), Indian chickweed, *Langué d'oiseau* (French), *Meierech* (German), *Meurdron* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), Mischievous jack, *Morsgeline* (French), *Morso di gallina* (Italian), *Morugem-branca* (Portuguese), *Morugem-vulgar* (Portuguese), *Mourdron* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), *Mouron* (French), *Mouron blanc* (French), *Mouron des oiseaux* (French), Murren, *Natagräs* (Swedish), *Nate* (Swedish), *Paperina* (Italian), Passerina, *Pihatähtimö* (Finnish), *Ptačinec prostřední* (Czech), *Ptačinec žabinec* (Czech), Rabbit-grass, Satin flower, *Serçe dili* (Turkish), Skirt and buttons, Skirt buttons, Star chickweed, Starweed, Starwort, *Stellaire intermédiaire* (French), *Stellaria* (Italian), *Sternmiere* (German), Stichwort, Stitchwort, Tongue-grass, *Våtarv* (Swedish), *Våtnarv* (Swedish), *Vesiheinä* (Finnish), *Vogelkraut* (German), *Vogelmiere* (German), *Vogelmuur* (Dutch), White bird's eye, Winterweed, and *Žabinec obecný* (Czech); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of 'give an account of yourself', rendezvous, and 'will you meet me'.

The flowers are said to open for only twelve hours. They droop after rain and take a few days to recover an erect position. An old term the 'Sleep of Plants' applies to common chickweed as at night the leaves meet and fold over new shoots. When the seeds are ripe the capsule opens and the seeds are distributed by the wind.

Warning – some authorities consider common chickweed to be potentially poisonous. It can be poisonous for some animals eg. sheep.

Media is Latin (middle) meaning 'middle or intermediate'.

Many of the common names reflect an association with birds which is hardly surprising as it is one of the few sources of fresh seed in Winter and has been used as birdfeed for hundreds of years.

Common chickweed has been a source of food for animals and human beings, the latter using the green leaves (especially young) in salads or as a cooked vegetable particularly in times of famine. Food historians have noted that it was familiar to the ancient Greeks and the Romans in Europe and that despite its abundance in the wild was occasionally cultivated by them – and on the other side of Asia it used also to be eaten centuries ago by the Japanese.

In North America it seems that the Iroquois Indians let their chickens eat the plant. – and one or two tribes appear to have found it of medicinal value. Chippewa Indians washed sore

eyes with it, and the Iroquois included it with other ingredients in poultices applied to some skin disorders and to wounds.

It is said that birds, pigs, rabbits, cows and horses will all eat the plant while sheep are indifferent about it and goats reject it.

Medicinally, it used to be an ingredient in a treatment for cramp, it was used in infusion as an eye lotion, and it was applied to carbuncles and abscesses. It is also understood that common chickweed was used for a very old and celebrated slimming draught. Today the plant can still be used sometimes – externally in a poultice for treating skin ulcers, boils and various skin diseases, and internally for treating rheumatism.

It is the birthday flower for 2nd May.