**Chickweed: In the Midst of Stars**

By Lupo Connell

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Finally, spring is here! As any plant lover can attest, the winter months seem to drag on forever. Every year, as winter begins to wane and spring is reborn, I look forward to seeing a familiar old friend and one of my favorite herbs, Chickweed (*Stellaria media*). When I find chickweed growing, I know that the warm weather is not far off, and I can finally shake the winter blues. Chickweed is a member of the botanical family, Caryophyllaceae, the pink family. Starweed is a common name for this plant; in Latin *stellaria* means “little star” and *media*, “in the midst of.” Chickweed has lovely oval-shaped smooth leaves attached to long leafstalks. When in bloom, it is covered in small white starlike flowers, with five petals (deeply divided so it looks like ten). An easy way to identify this plant correctly is to look for a single line of hairs running down an otherwise smooth stalk. (It is always important to positively identify any plant before using it; if in doubt, do not harvest until you have made a positive ID.)

Chickweed, being a common weed, grows almost anywhere. It enjoys a moist environment and commonly frequents gardens. Many gardeners have found it to make an excellent cover crop. Finding chickweed in your garden is a good indication of fertile, mineral rich soil, as it helps the soil to retain nitrogen. There are also the gardeners who have cursed chickweed before learning about the plant’s wonderful attributes. I even had a friend who used to call it “devil in the garden” before I turned him on to its edible gourmet pleasures.

Chickweed is a wonderfully nutritious herbal green. Rich in minerals, vitamins, and proteins this herb makes an excellent addition to spring meals. Chickweed contains vitamin A, vitamin C, several B vitamins, calcium, phosphorus, potassium, and zinc. It can be mixed in salads, used in place of lettuce on sandwiches, added to grains or couscous, and my personal favorite chickweed pesto. (See recipe sidebar.) And of course, this herb always makes a delightful snack when you come across a patch while working in the garden or walking along a woodland trail.

Chickweed has a long history of use. Native Americans used chickweed as a spring tonic as well as a nutritious edible green. Many European ancestors also used chickweed in the same fashion. Medicinally, chickweed has an affinity for cooling the system and can be beneficial for heated conditions, including urinary tract and kidney infections. It is also a mild diuretic. Topically, chickweed can be used for skin eruptions, hemorrhoids, cuts, wounds, and burns. Fresh chickweed poultices can be used to draw out infection and reduce inflammation and swelling. To make a poultice, simply chop up the fresh herb, apply to irritated area and cover with gauze or a bandage. A fresh poultice is a simple effective remedy for conjunctivitis. Chickweed makes excellent medicinal oil (see recipe sidebar) and healing salve that work well topically for eczema and psoriasis. It is especially helpful for itching and irritation. Chickweed also has a reputation as a weight loss herb. Rich in soapy saponins, chickweed can help dissolve fat and assist in balancing metabolism. And finally, this wonderful little herb has the ability to help dissolve cysts.

It is best to collect chickweed in the early spring, although it can be found growing year round, particularly in our mild climate. Chickweed loves the moist cool whether and will turn brown as summer approaches. Not to worry though, she almost always returns in the fall. Harvest the aerial portions before or during flowering. Use scissors to trim chickweed, giving the plant a “haircut.” This ensures that your patch will remain vital throughout the season.

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**Lupo’s Chickweed Pesto**

2 cups fresh chickweed  
2-4 cloves garlic  
1/4 cup oil  
1/2 cup walnuts  
1/2 cup feta cheese  
Sea salt to taste  

Chop fresh chickweed and garlic before adding to food processor. Add cheese and nuts, cover. Begin food processor, slowly add oil; you may need more or less depending upon personal preference. When proper consistency is reached add sea salt to taste and blend. Serve pesto mixed with pasta or rice or on top of chicken, fish, tofu, or veggies. Enjoy!

**Chickweed oil**

After harvesting chickweed, spread the herb out on a towel and allow it to sit, out of the sunlight, overnight. The following day, chop your freshly wilted chickweed and place in a clean, dry glass jar. Pour enough high quality olive oil over the herbs so that they are completely covered. Allow your herbal oil to sit in a warm and sunny location where it can infuse for at least two weeks. Be sure to label and store in a cool dry place. This oil can be used topically or can be made into a slave, lotion, or ointment. It will remain good for one year.

**Dosage**

Chickweed is considered a safe herb. You may wish to take it in tincture form, 30-60 drops up to three times a day. You may also make an infusion and drink up to 2-4 cups daily. Or you may simply graze on a few handfuls of chickweed as you work in your garden.

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