

## The Wonders of Chickweed by Terry Tuxford UK



Chickweed

Over the years there have been many references to providing our birds with Chickweed because of its benefits. I thought I would do a little research to try and find out why.

Chickweed is a plant of Eurasian origin that's made itself quite at home everywhere that Europeans have travelled and is now a common weed almost world-wide. Chickweed is an annual but it often germinates in the autumn as well as year-round, and survives through the winter, flowering and setting seed in the early spring and then dying off by summer. It's at its best in the spring and autumn, as it greatly prefers cool and damp conditions, and will not survive where it's dry and hot.

Chickweed has shallow, fibrous, fragile roots and is easy to uproot accidentally, but will quickly recover if put back. The plant's weak stems mostly trail along the ground, for up to about sixteen inches, but the growing ends may be upright and up to eight inches high. The stems branch very frequently and take root at the leaf junctions. If you look very closely at the stems, you'll see a single line of hairs running up the side, and you'll notice that the line changes sides at each leaf junction. The leaves are smooth and oval with a point at the tip, and the older leaves are stalked, while the new leaves are not.

Chickweed always seems to be flowering, except in the dead of winter. It has tiny white flowers, about a quarter inch in diameter. The flowers close at night and open in the morning and when it's about to rain.

The flowers develop into small capsule-like fruits which contain many tiny seeds – up to 15,000 per plant

### **Herbal Medicinal Benefits**

Chickweed, a mild herb, is used primarily to support the urinary system. Some use it to provide nutrients that must be present for the body's metabolism-balancing functions.

Chickweed is commonly used as an external remedy for cuts, wounds and especially for itching and irritation. If eczema or psoriasis causes this sort of irritation, Chickweed may be used with benefit. Internally it has a reputation as a remedy for rheumatism.

Chickweed has a significant nutritive side which is of great benefit with exhaustion and fatigue conditions. Chickweed's energy dynamics include large amounts of proteins and minerals and may help to restore strength.

The plant's leaves are excellent sources of vitamins A (in the form of beta carotene), B, C, and D and are also a rich source of minerals such as calcium, potassium, phosphorus, manganese, zinc, magnesium, copper, and iron. It is also very high in alpha linolenic acid, an Omega-3 fatty acid that is important to cardiovascular health. Other plant sources of alpha linolenic acid commonly fed to cage birds include flaxseed, rapeseed, soybeans, wheat germ, purslane, and green leafy vegetables such as spinach, kale, and broccoli. Of these, chickweed and flaxseed are the best sources of this vital fatty acid.

### **Acts As A Digestive Aid And Helps Regulate The Metabolism**



Chickweed taken internally acts as a digestive aid and helps regulate the metabolism. The steroidal saponins in chickweed increase the permeability of the mucous membranes thus increasing the absorption of nutrients, especially minerals from the digestive tract. This same action helps to neutralize toxins, weaken bacterial cell walls and dissolve growths such as warts and cysts.

This same steroidal saponin action that increases the permeability of mucous membranes by partially dissolving them, produces an expectorant effect in the throat, and together with its cooling and moisture effect, is useful in heated chest conditions, such as bronchitis and other heavy respiratory congestion.

Chickweed has been used to “lubricate” the joints, soothe rheumatism, gout and arthritis, and regulate intestinal flora, absorb toxins from the bowel and regulate colonic bacterial and yeast. It has traditionally been used for obesity, dissolving and liquefying the membrane around fat cells and allowing them to pass easily out of the body, cleansing the blood and ridding the liver and kidneys of harmful wastes.

Chickweed is useful for stomach conditions where there is dryness and hunger and thirst, also for dry, unproductive coughs including whooping cough. It benefits bladder infections, helps promote urination, and is good for local congestion in tight cramped muscles. Its significant iron content makes it useful in anaemic conditions.

### **Now To The Birds**

As the name “chick weed” suggests, this plant has been given to birds for nearly as long as birds have been kept in captivity. In fact, John Gerard wrote of chickweed in his classic 1597 English text on medicinal plants *Herbal or General History of Plants* that “little birds in cages (especially Linnets) are refreshed with the lesser Chickweed, and also rabbits; cows and horses will eat it; sheep are indifferent to it, but goats refuse to touch it”.

When feeding any green food to your birds it is essential that it is clean and free from any contamination. The practice of picking chickweed from gardens, wasteland and roadsides is fraught with danger and should not be encouraged unless it can be guaranteed as safe.

Fresh chickweed does not freeze well so it must be used fresh or dried. Good quality dried herbs should retain a deep green colour. If the leaves lose their colour, the herbs should be discarded. Dried chickweed may be placed in a plastic freezer bag and stored in the freezer for 6 months or so. The most practical form of chickweed to use during the winter months is the dried form. This can be purchased at a reasonable cost through bulk herb suppliers.

Another alternative is to grow your own in a greenhouse or garden. Seed can be easily purchased and are really cheap with a 1 gram packet averaging 2,000 seeds costing about £4 plus postage and packing – Google chickweed seed for sale

### **References:**

[www.kingdomplantae.net](http://www.kingdomplantae.net)

Herbs for Birds – Chickweed, by Marie Miley-Russell

<http://www.budgerigarworld.com/the-wonders-of-chickweed/>

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