



Ground Ivy - *Glechoma hederacea* (Lamiaceae)

Identification

Ground ivy, also known as gill-over-the-ground, is a perennial herb in the mint family with square stems less than a foot tall. Ground ivy roots at the stem nodes and can spread quickly along roadsides, around dwellings, in disturbed areas, and in woodlands, forming a groundcover (Magee & Ahles, 1999).



The leaves of ground ivy are approximately 1 inch long, reniform or cordate in shape, oppositely arranged, and with crenate leaf margins (Magee & Ahles, 1999). The long petioles have sparse hairs, but you might need a hand lens to see them (Flora of North America Editorial Committee, 2004)!

Ground ivy flowers are purplish-blue, irregular, and are clustered in groups of three or six at the leaf axils. Like most plants in the Lamiaceae family, ground ivy has irregular flowers. The upper flower lips are small and shallowly lobed and the lower lips are larger with a long middle lobe. The flowers are approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ inch long and have short pedicels, four stamens, and a four-lobed ovary (Magee & Ahles, 1999). Ground ivy fruits are tiny nutlets (Flora of North America Editorial Committee, 2004).

Use

High in vitamin C (Magee & Ahles, 1999), ground ivy leaves also contain calcium, iron, potassium, and zinc (USDA, 2015). Young leaves can be eaten raw or cooked, but do have a fairly bitter taste (Magee & Ahles, 1999).

In Western herbalism, ground ivy leaves are considered cooling and drying and used as a diaphoretic, anti-catarrhal, and expectorant—a handy herbal ally for anyone with a cold, congestion, or earache (McIntyre & Boudin, 2012). It has also been used historically to ease the pain of headaches and may be particularly useful for sinus and congestive headaches (Grieve, 1982, McIntyre & Boudin, 2012). As a vulnerary, anti-inflammatory, and bitter digestive tonic, ground ivy can be used in cases of poor appetite or absorption and inflammatory bowel conditions (McIntyre & Boudin, 2012).

Though harvest can happen year round, it is best to harvest aerial parts in the spring when leaves are tender and the flowers are beginning to bloom. Ground ivy leaves can be dried for tea (though, with their bitter and slightly pungent taste, you may prefer to prepare them as a syrup or tincture). For inflamed skin or minor abrasions, ground ivy can also be used topically, as a poultice or in an oil or cream.



Safety

Avoid during pregnancy and breastfeeding, in children under twelve, and in those with gastritis, reflux, epilepsy, liver disease, or kidney disease (McIntyre & Boudin, 2012).

References

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