

Shepherd's Purse (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*)



Shepherd's Purse Flowers

In Medieval times, shepherds carried a purse that was shaped something like the flat wedge-shaped or heart-shaped seedpod of the plant that now bears its name.

The plant originated in Europe but now is a very common weed in gardens and waste places throughout the temperate zone. It is a member of the Mustard Family. It adapts quickly to new environments and changes as needed. As a result this and other members of the Mustard Family are more likely to survive global climatic changes whereas other plants that take a long time to grow may become extinct.

Tiny white flowers with four petals and six stamens form on a stem from spring to fall. It can grow to be twenty inches high. The basal leaves are deeply lobed.



Shepherd's Purse Basal Leaves

Smaller leaves clasp the stem.



Shepherd's Purse Stem Leaves

The young leaves can be used in salads. "When the leaves become too strong even for these uses, the seedpods can be used as a spice, which is the origin of another folk name, 'poor man's pepper.' When minced with vinegar,

the pods become a relish for meat and fish, something like hot mustard in flavor. In fact, European peasants once gathered shepherd's purse seeds, dried them, and ground them into mustard." (Henderson, R., pp. 147-148).



Shepherd's Purse Seedpods