

# INFUSE

Week 1 - Introduction

Cleavers (*Galium aparine*)

Gathering  
GROUND



# INFUSE

Welcome to Cleavers Month!

And welcome to Spring!

This first week serves as an introduction to this amazing, unassuming yet tenacious little plant.

Get to know this plant in meditation, through its many names, identification characteristics, and through visiting them in the wild.

With a spring in my step,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Liz', written in a cursive style.







We begin with an introduction to  
Cleavers in the following journey...



meet Cleavers



# etymology

Cleavers *cleave* readily to clothing and fur, hence the name. The interesting thing about the word *cleave* is that it means both to cling and to split. I like to think of that in terms of Cleavers ability to heal wounds.

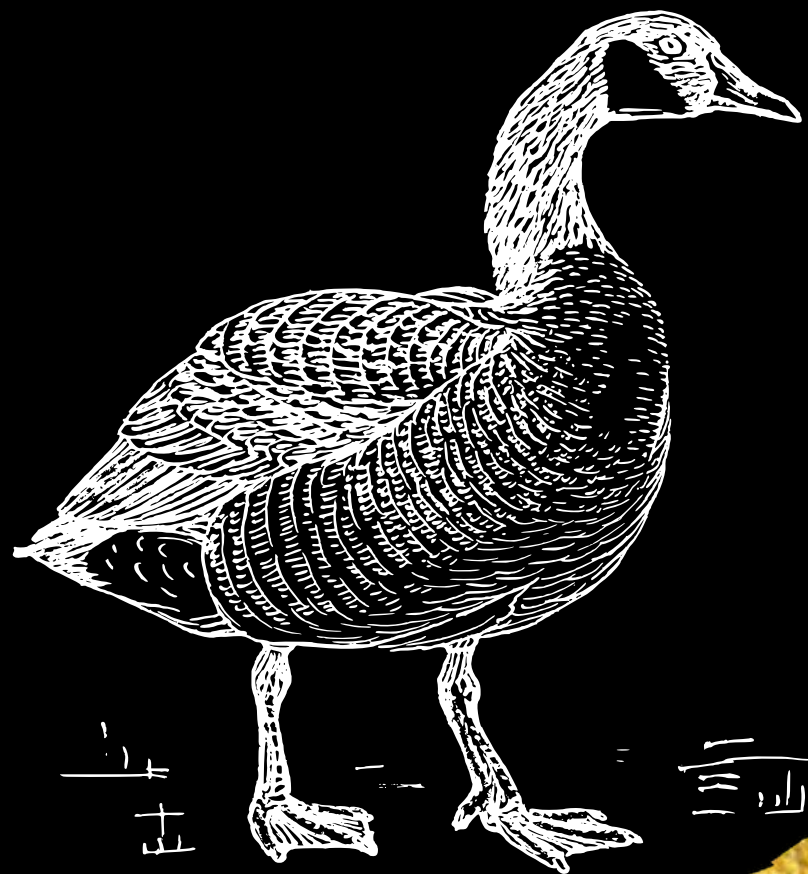
Genus name *Galium* is said to derive from the Ancient Greek word for milk, *gála γάλα*, as it has been used traditionally to curdle milk for making cheese.

The species name *aparine* also comes from Ancient Greek ἀπαρίνη (*aparínē*), from root word *aparo* meaning "to seize."



*The Anglo-Saxons called it  
hedge rife, meaning a tax gatherer  
or robber, from its habit of plucking  
wool from passing sheep.*

Anna Franklin, Hearth Witch



sticky Willy  
goosegrass  
catchweed  
everlasting friendship  
sticky buds  
scratch-weed  
grip-grass  
bedstraw  
bobby buttons  
gollenweed  
sweethearts  
kisses  
claggy meggies  
robin-run-the-hedge...

...and more!

Here's a great collection of other  
names for this plant.

nicknames

What name will you give Cleavers?

gatheringground.nyc



# identification

Cleavers is an herbaceous perennial that begins as a small, upright, weak-stemmed plant and grows to a gangly, flopping stature, clinging to itself and neighboring plants for dear life.

The colony of plants form a mat or web over every plant around them.

The entire plant is covered in bristles which give it its characteristic stickiness.

Whorls of six to eight leaves grow up the length of the square stem.



# identification

Tiny white four-petaled flowers grow individually or in small clusters up to three in number.





# identification

Double spherical sticky bur-like  
fruit follow the flowers.





# distribution

Cleavers are native to much of the Northern Hemisphere, circumnavigating the globe through North Africa, Eurasia, and North America.

Cleavers are in the Rubiaceae family, relatives of coffee (*Coffea*), madder (*Rubia*), cinchona (*Cinchona*), gardenia (*Gardenia*), other bedstraws (*Galium*), and many other plants.

There are over 600 *Galium* species worldwide. Plants in the *Galium* genus are also called "bedstraw" as they mat together well to make straw for bedding.



Head to a park, a garden, or a sun-dappled path.

Let your gaze settle along the edges and clearings.

Look for just-emerging tiny forests of whorled green beings.

Lean down and graze the edges of these plants with your fingers.

Do you feel the gripping stickyness?

Then you've found Cleavers!

invitation



# honoring



Set up an altar to Cleavers.

Here are some suggestions for what to include:

- Sticky things (burs, velcro)
- Pictures or statues of Geese
- Images of Goddesses: Holda, Epona, Juno
- Green stones or crystals (green calcite, green aventurine, prehnite)
- Red, white, or green candle





# INFUSE

Week 2 - Sticking around



Cleavers (*Galium aparine*)

Gathering  
GROUND



# INFUSE

It's Cleavers Week 2

This week we'll check on Cleavers out in the wild to see where they are emerging.

We'll begin to look at some energetic and medicinal benefits and how to apply the plant topically.

We'll make an herbal preparation and work with the plant magically.

Let's get up close and personal with this sticky plant.

Faithfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Liz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "L" and a long, sweeping tail.







Let's go out to meet Cleavers in the wild.



# meet Cleavers

image: [Luis Nunes Alberto](#)

[gatheringground.nyc](http://gatheringground.nyc)



# cleave



*to cling, stick, adhere*

With regard to Cleavers, this is descriptive of the physical trait of clinging to fur, fabric, and other plants.

We can also think of this as the conditions that Cleavers helps to alleviate - cases where something is "stuck," For example, stuck or stagnant lymph, and constipation.



*to split, cut, slice, divide*

Again, this is descriptive of a physical attribute, the split or divided lance-shaped leaflets in whorls.

And it describes something that Cleavers is used to treat: cuts, wounds.





I like to imagine Cleavers functions a bit like a spiderweb does for wounds. Both are antimicrobial and help to stop bleeding.

I also associate Cleavers with spiders as the tiny barbs remind me of the tiny hairs that cover those arachnids. Cleavers can also create webs or mats (which also act as a filter - more on that later).



sticky



# flow

Energetically, Cleavers gets us unstuck.

Cleavers has an affinity to the waterways or rivers of the body, clearing blocks and allowing us to flow.

This plant "cuts through" and breaks up stagnation built up in the form of inflammation in the lymph (swollen glands), liver congestion, fibrous breast tissue, skin growths, and stones in the urinary tract.





Cleavers is cooling and anti-inflammatory making it useful for red, hot conditions.

Think of Cleavers for relieving rashes, sunburn, eczema, and psoriasis.

There are several ways to apply Cleavers topically.

Fresh plant material is best, however if you only have access to dried Cleavers, that can be helpful, too.



cooling



# topical

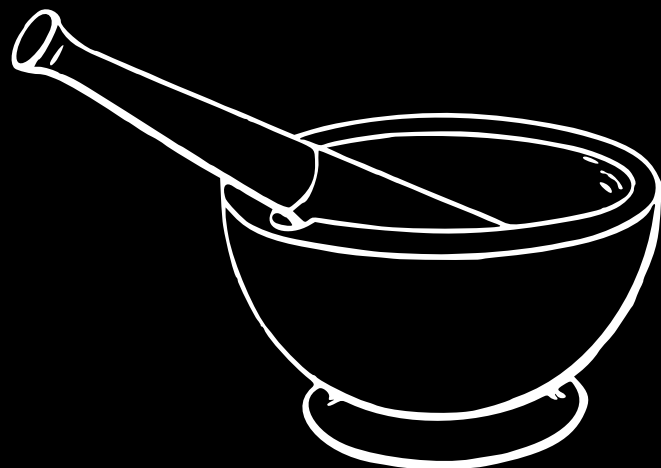
Here are a few ways to work with Cleavers for topical applications.

Blend the fresh plant material into a slurry or juice it.  
Apply this directly to the affected area or freeze the mix into ice cubes for later use.

Mash up the fresh plant material or reconstitute dried Cleavers to make a poultice.

Preserve the blended juice as a succus by adding enough alcohol (drinking alcohol not rubbing alcohol) to achieve at least 20% alcohol by volume.

Infuse fresh Cleavers in vinegar. This is a great remedy for sunburn. It can also be taken internally as a nourishing and detoxifying tonic.





If you don't have access to fresh Cleavers, that's okay, too.

In the next video I'll show you how to make a cold infusion with dried Cleavers I gathered last year. I'll also share how to use the marc (spent herbs) as a poultice.



infuse



# reflect

Before we gather medicine, let's set intentions.

Take a moment to reflect.

How will you work with Cleavers?


I invite you to sit, breathe, and journal if you feel called.

Pause this video and set a timer for 5 minutes.

Free write what comes up for you.





A close-up photograph of two hands held palm-up over a body of water. The hands are positioned one above the other, with the upper hand slightly to the right. The water surface is dark and shows ripples. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the skin and the water. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

Perhaps you want to work with Cleavers  
solely on an energetic level for now.

Maybe you just want to meet this plant  
in the wild.

These intentions are just as important as  
working with the physical medicine.

However you choose to work with  
Cleavers, consider what you will offer in  
exchange.

intentions





*Give a gift, in reciprocity for what you have taken.  
Sustain the ones who sustain you and the earth will last forever.*

*~ Robin Wall Kimmerer*



A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a small, dark, textured stone. The hand is positioned on the left side of the frame, with the thumb and index finger gripping the stone. The background is dark and out of focus. At the top of the image, there is a yellow, torn paper-like border. The word "offerings" is written in white, serif font on this yellow border.

# offerings

What gift will you offer Cleavers?

Some suggestions...

Sweet smelling herbs


Tobacco

Clear crystals

A special stone

A song



A close-up photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a brown hat and a blue scarf, holding a large bunch of green Cleavers plants. The background is a dense field of similar plants. The lighting is soft, and the overall tone is natural and earthy.

Collect the aerial parts all together in early spring to use as a fresh tonic. Gently pull them or use a pair of scissors or clippers. Pay attention to the quality of the plants, only gathering the greenest and healthiest looking ones.

In mid to late spring, gather Cleavers when in flower as the coumarin content increases, indicated by a sweet vanilla-like scent.



# binding magic



Two of the nicknames for Cleavers – *everlasting friendship* and *sweethearts* – allude to their connection with love and commitment.

Cleavers are used in binding magic to strengthen bonds between people, and also to bind people from doing harm.

Binding spells can also help you "stick to" or commit to a good habit or new endeavor.





# binding magic



Conversely, Cleavers also helps us release what we are clinging to that is no longer serving us, and can help us get out of a rut or a bind.

In the following video I'll show you a simple commitment ritual with the help of Cleavers.





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<https://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/discover-wild-plants-nature/plant-fungi-species/cleavers>

Images of my hands, photo credit: Denisse Monge.



# INFUSE

Week 3 - Goosegrass



Cleavers (*Galium aparine*)

Gathering  
GROUND



# INFUSE

Week 3 of Cleavers is here!

How's it going so far?

I hope you are beginning to get a grasp of the gifts Cleavers offers.

This week we'll go deeper with the medicinal benefits of Cleavers, utilize Cleavers in an improvised recipe, and look at the connection between Cleavers and Geese.

Many blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Liz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "L" and a trailing flourish.








Let's check on Cleavers to  
see how they're growing.



get outside





Cleavers, aka Goosegrass,  
is foraged by humans and  
certain birds, alike.

*Can you guess which ones?*



# goosegrass

Well certainly, Geese!

And on Turtle Island, other birds such as Wild Turkey, Ring-necked Pheasant, and Prairie Chicken dine on the seeds of Cleavers.







*An erb that is cald clyvers  
that yonge gese eten*

Dawson, W. R.,  
A leech book of the 15th Century (1934)



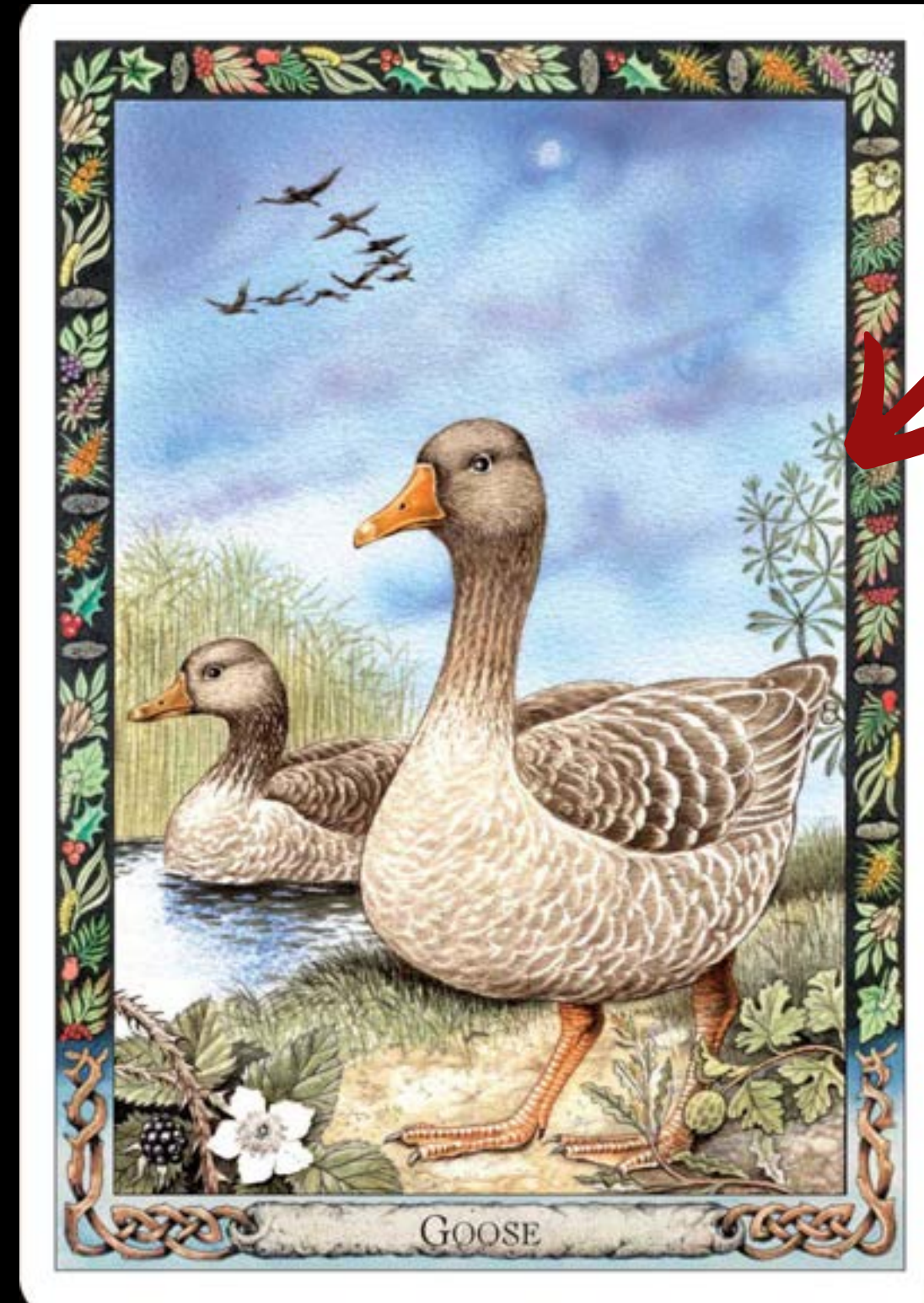


# goosegrass

That there is Goosegrass!

There are many parallels between Cleavers/Goosegrass and the Geese they are named after.

Like Geese, Cleavers can be seen as tenacious and territorial, taking over a big patch of land. And at the same time Geese are good, nurturing mothers – fiercely protective if need be. Cleavers feed us with their nutrients, tend our wounds, and nurture us back to health after illness.







# goosegrass

Geese are committed to their flock,  
their mates, and their children – a trait  
akin to the stickiness or binding  
nature of Cleavers.



Goose grease or fat is a traditional healing remedy of people native to Turtle Island, Ireland, and the British Isles.

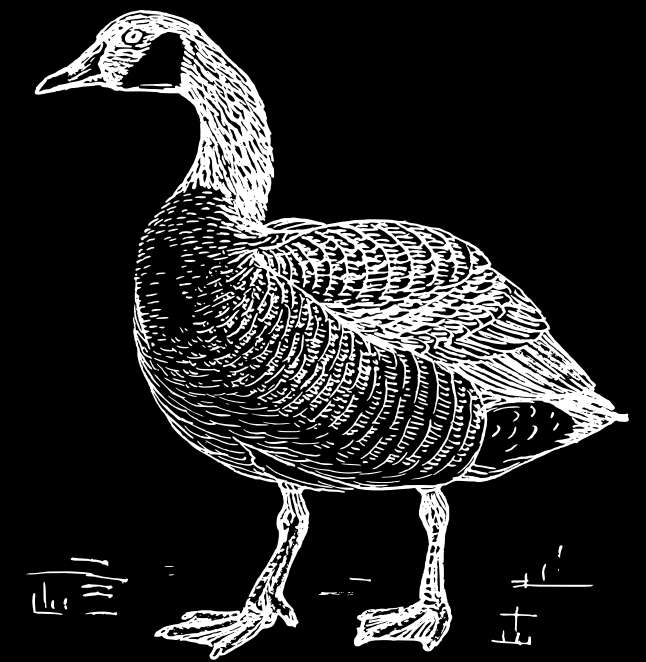
It is used by Mi'kmaq people as a base for salves, such as chest ointment for coughs (with Birch bark) and healing balms for the skin.

Gibanirtick (Gioban Iortach) is the name of Goose grease in Gaelic – it was used to heal ulcers and cancers.

Cleavers also has the potential to heal cancers, ulcers, and tumors. It is used to treat mastitis and cysts.



goose grease





# goosegrass

Like Geese, Cleavers has an affinity with water.

Cleavers is diuretic and lymphatic, working in the waters of the body to bring movement and detoxification, fluid balance, and reduced stagnation.







Goddesses associated with Geese include...



# Holda

Goddess of spinning and weaving

Think of the spider from the last lesson and the web or mat that Cleavers forms.

We can also think of spinning and weaving tales, as in the Brothers Grimm tale of Frau Holle, where she encourages a young girl to shake her Goose feather down pillow and make it snow.

Holda is an ancient goddess and protector of the land who is also connected with Elder (*Sambucus*).



Mother Holle by Otto Kubel

goose Goddess



# Juno



Henri-Paul Motte (1846–1922)

Although the Peacock is her official sacred animal, Geese are also very important to this Roman goddess

In 390 BCE, it is said that the sacred Geese of Juno's temple warned of an attack from the Gallic army on the Roman Capitol. Another demonstration of the protectiveness and territorial sense of Geese.

goose Goddess





And while she isn't a goddess, it would be remiss to leave out

## Mother Goose

The origins of Mother Goose are debated, but she may go back at least as far as the 8th century CE as Bertrada II of Laon, aka mother of Charlemagne. She was also called Bertrada Broadfoot or Goose-foot.

goose Goddess



Interestingly, there is a conflation with Bertrada and the goddess Percht (also connected with Holda) who was also said to have one large Goose foot – the foot she used at the treadle of her spinning machine.

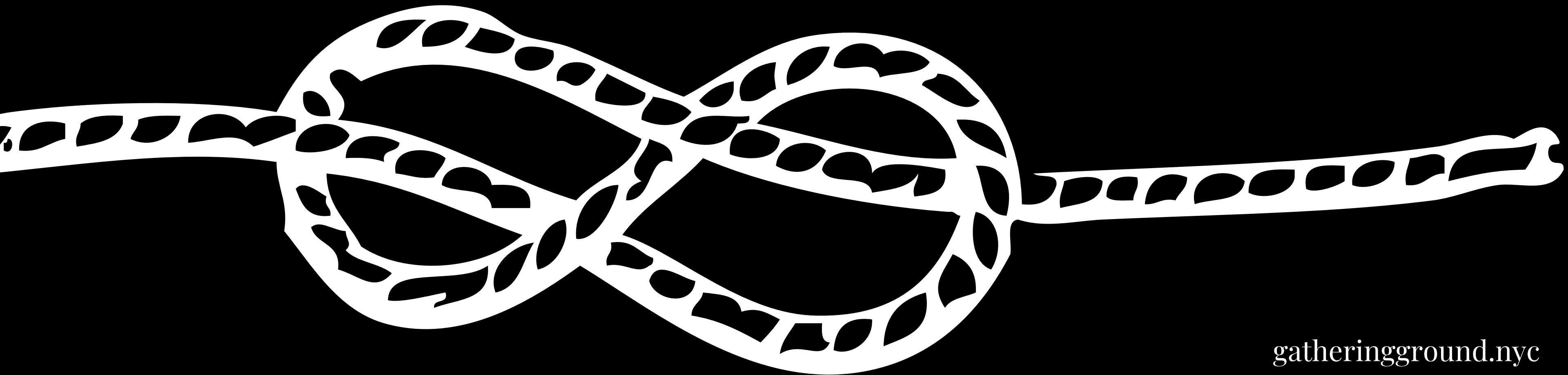
Spinning a yarn, weaving a tale...



goose Goddess



And speaking of weaving, check out how to make cordage  
with last season's Cleavers (if you can still find some).



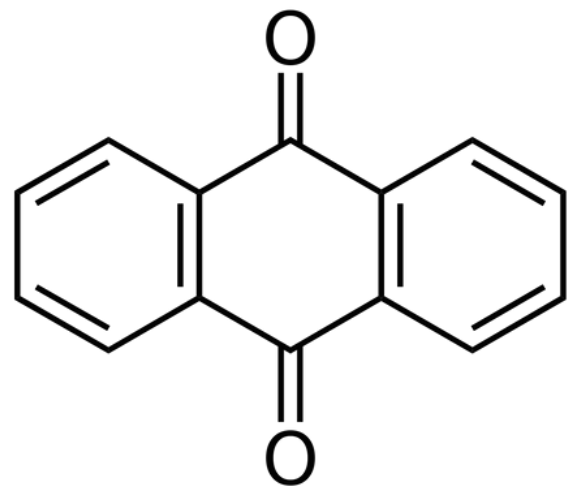
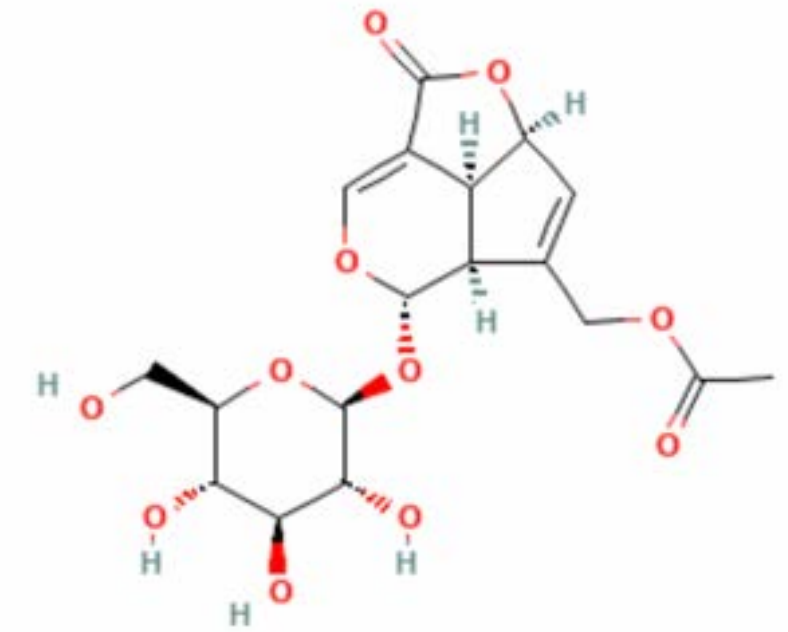


# chemistry

Let's shift gears and look at the chemistry of Cleavers.

Cleavers contains many plant compounds, some of which are recognized for their specific actions:

- Asperuloside – known as a laxative
- Coumarins – blood thinning compounds
- Gallotannic acid – known to stop bleeding and alleviate skin conditions
- Polyphenolic acids and flavonoids – anti-inflammatory, antioxidant compounds



Anthraquinones have been isolated from the root – some of the effects attributed to them: laxative, diuretic, estrogenic, and immunomodulatory.

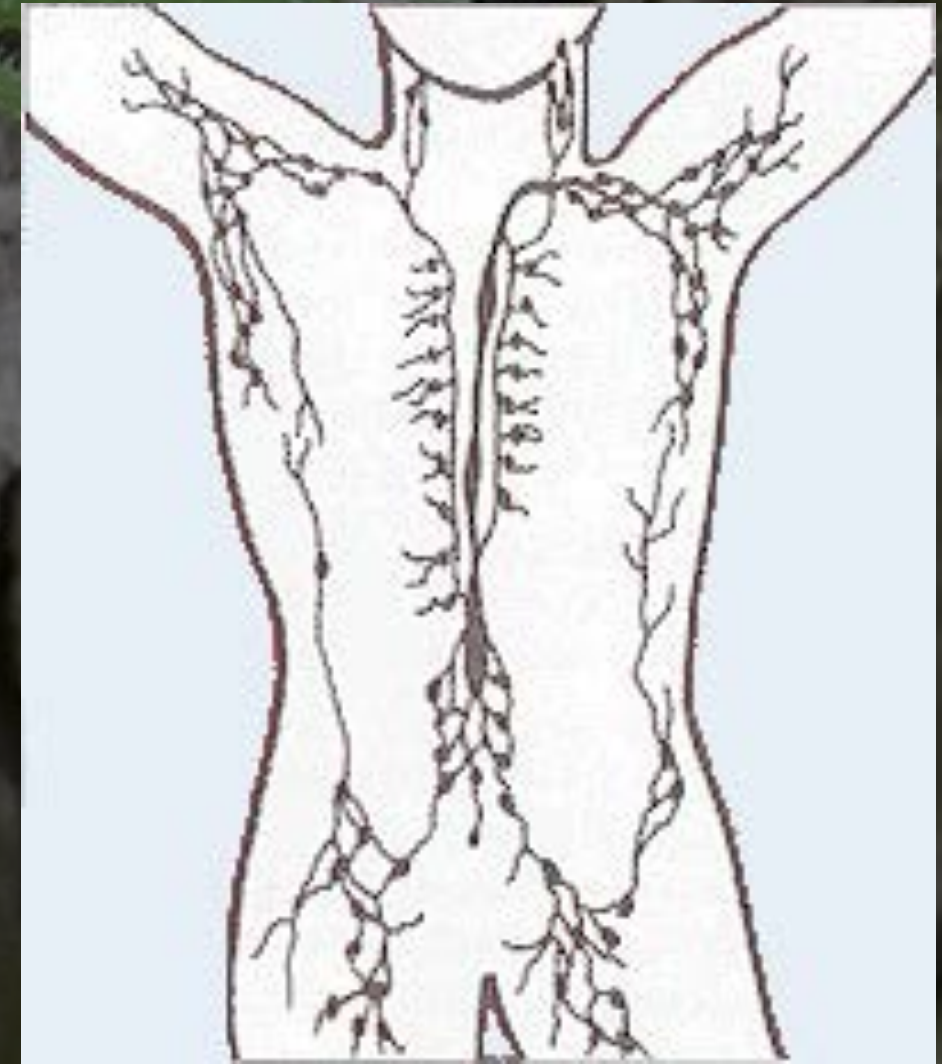
These compounds are also what makes the roots yield red dye, like Cleavers' relative Madder (*Rubia tinctorum*).



Cleavers is most often thought of as a cooling, anti-inflammatory, lymphatic herb.

This means that Cleavers helps to disperse lymphatic fluids in swollen, hot or inflamed lymph glands - for example swollen glands at the neck, chest, underarms, breast, or groin.

This can occur when someone has or is getting over a viral or bacterial infection, during cancer treatment or recovery, or for those who are sedentary.



lymph



# urinary

Cleavers is also diuretic.

The herbal infusion or tincture can help to reduce swelling or edema in the hands and feet.

Cleavers can help clear urinary tract infections, including cystitis and bladder infections.

The Anishinaabe use Cleavers to treat kidney problems, including difficulty urinating due to gravel or sand (small kidney stones). The Penobscot and Mi'kmaq also use this plant for kidney issues.



Cleavers is protective and healing to the liver and helps to stimulate the production of bile to encourage eliminatory and detoxifying actions.

Cleavers act as a mild laxative, helping in cases of constipation.

Conversely, the astringency of Cleavers can also help relieve diarrhea.

digestion & elimination



# wildcraft

In the late winter to early spring when Cleavers begins to emerge, the leaves and stems are still tender and good for mixing into smoothies, soups, or pesto.

In this next video I go out to harvest some Cleavers and other wild baby greens to mix together into a simple improvised pesto.





# references

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# INFUSE

Week 4 - Bedstraw

Cleavers (*Galium aparine*)

Gathering  
GROUND



# INFUSE

It's Week 4 of Cleavers!

Have you been able to get outside and find this wild and weedy plant?

Whether you've spied this plant in person yet or not, I hope this week's lesson will get you juiced up about working with Cleavers!

(Psst! That's a hint at what we'll be doing this week 😊.)

Stay juicy,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Liz". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long tail on the final letter.







# intentions

Perhaps you are still getting to know this plant and need a bit more time to decide if and how you will work with them.

It's important to ask the questions ahead of time - what are my intentions for working with this plant?

Ask:

*Why do I need this?*

*How will I use this?*

*How much do I need?*

*Who else needs this?*

*Is there abundance?*

*How can I give back?*

In this lesson you'll learn more about some of the ways Cleavers can be partnered with for healing, which might help to inform your intentions.





Cleavers grows in abundance in most places where it grows natively or is naturalized.

The plant prefers cool, moist soil, often in the shade of other plants or in the sun-dappled edge. This also speaks to the energetics of this plant as a cooling, moistening remedy.

Cleavers is a very easy plant to harvest, especially before flowering. Once it flowers, it becomes a bit more stringy. You can still likely pick it by hand, but you might want to have a pair of scissors, clippers, or a knife just in case.

harvest



In this video, we'll get a magnified view of the leaves and I'll harvest a bit of the young tops.

There's still more growing to do for this plant!  
The faint hint of vanilla scent is there, but it will increase as the sunlight continues to increase.



harvest







# filter

Cleavers is known as an alterative or blood cleansing agent. Drinking the juice or infusion 2 to 3 times per day for a few weeks can be helpful if one has recently experienced a bacterial or viral infection, or is detoxifying after cancer treatment.





Cleavers is also called Bedstraw, as the plant and its relatives in the *Galium* genus have been used to stuff pillows and mattresses.



Deer are known to make Cleavers their bedding, too.



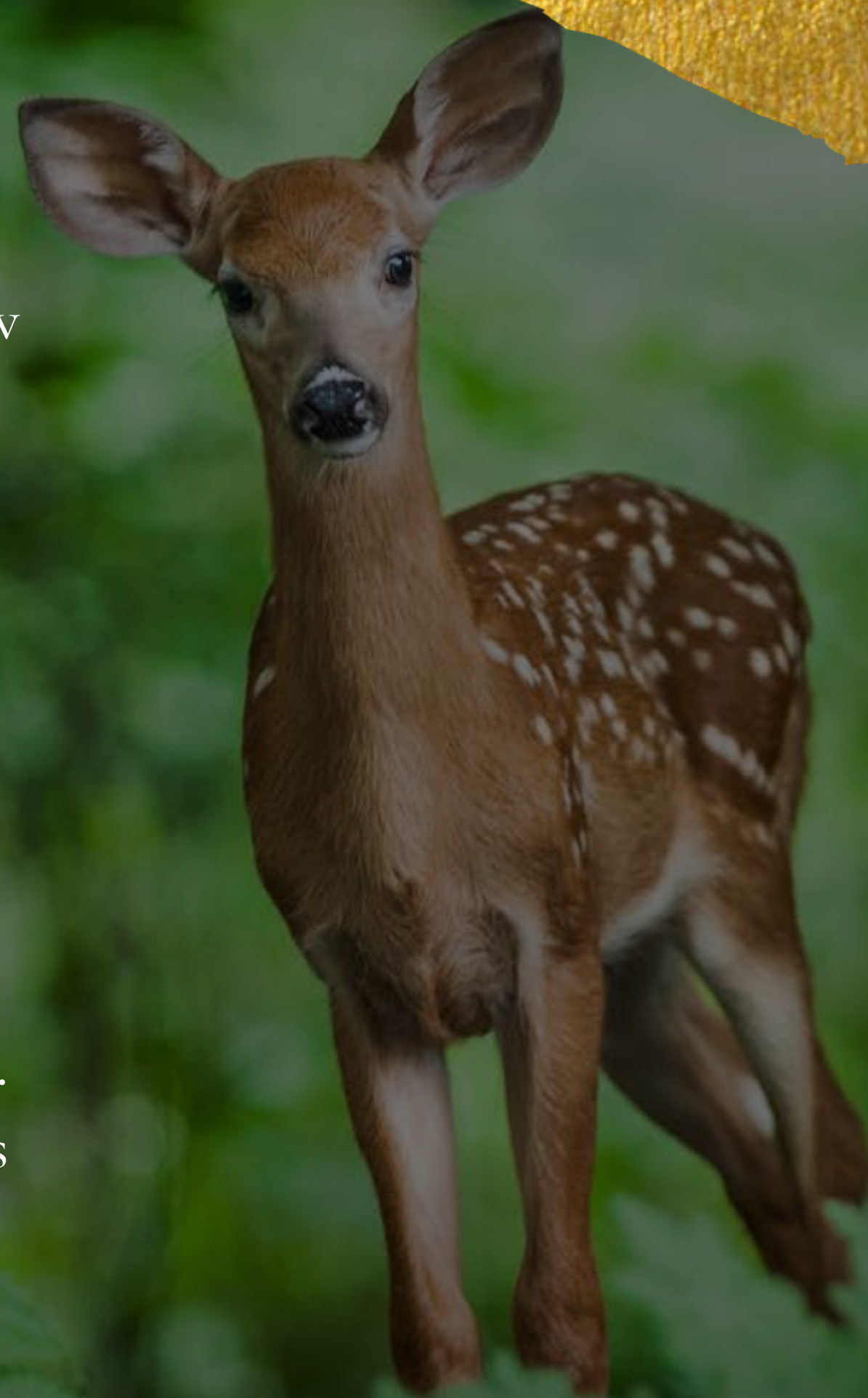
bedstraw



# deer medicine

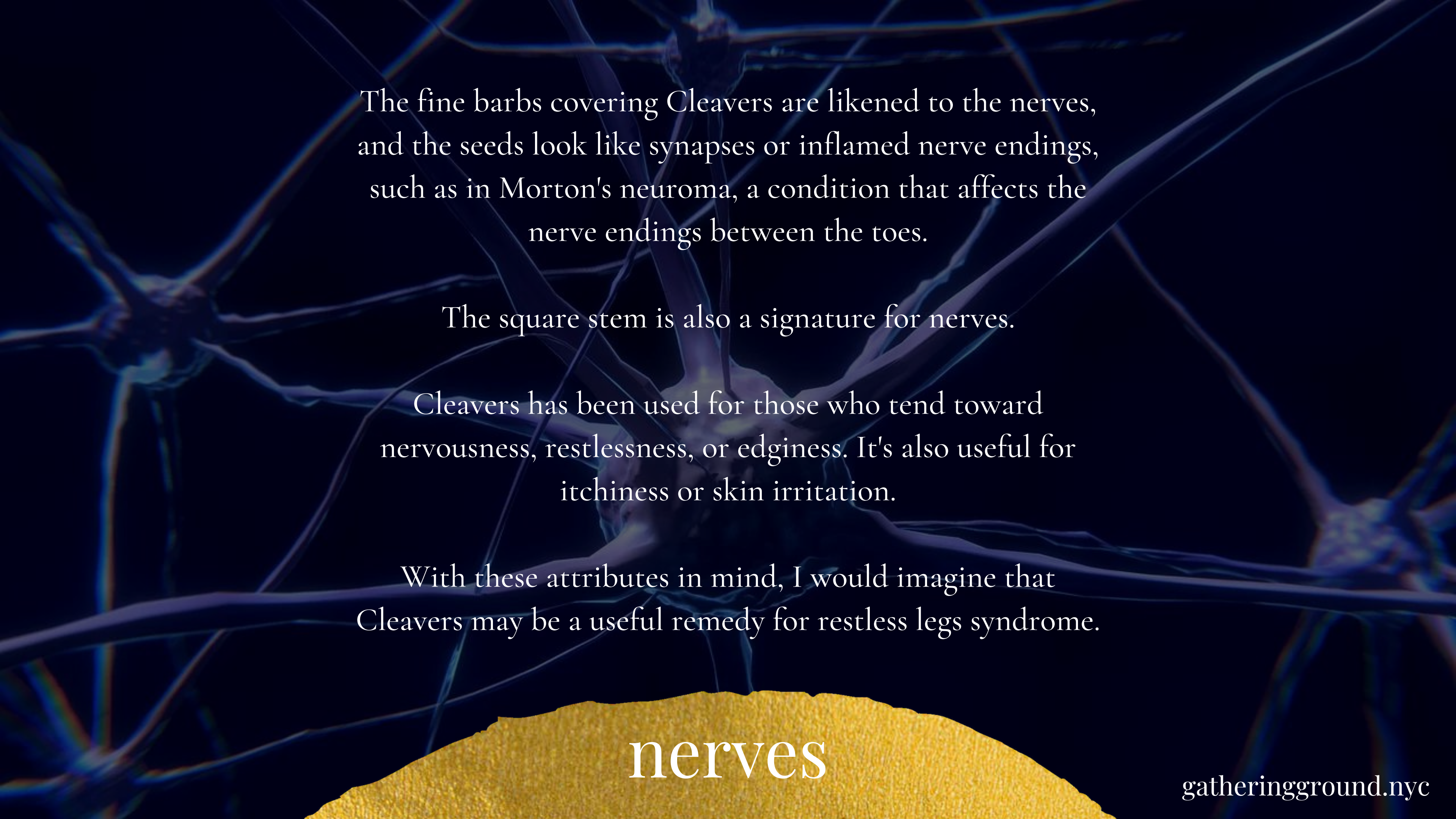
According to herbalist Matthew Wood, Cleavers is known as a Deer medicine in Native American herbalism. Deer medicine has an affinity with the nerves.

The long, angular, thin legs of Deer resemble the long, angular, thin stalks of Cleavers. Deer are also said to sometimes give birth to their fawns in patches of Cleavers.



In both Europe and on Turtle Island, Cleavers has been employed as a "birthing remedy." Wood has used the herb to "restore stamina after an exhausting labor."





The fine barbs covering Cleavers are likened to the nerves, and the seeds look like synapses or inflamed nerve endings, such as in Morton's neuroma, a condition that affects the nerve endings between the toes.

The square stem is also a signature for nerves.

Cleavers has been used for those who tend toward nervousness, restlessness, or edginess. It's also useful for itchiness or skin irritation.

With these attributes in mind, I would imagine that Cleavers may be a useful remedy for restless legs syndrome.

nerves



# beauty rest

Cleavers can help those who tend toward nervousness restore a sense of calm, and get much-needed rest.

In this way, Cleavers restores vitality, and perhaps a sense of youthfulness.

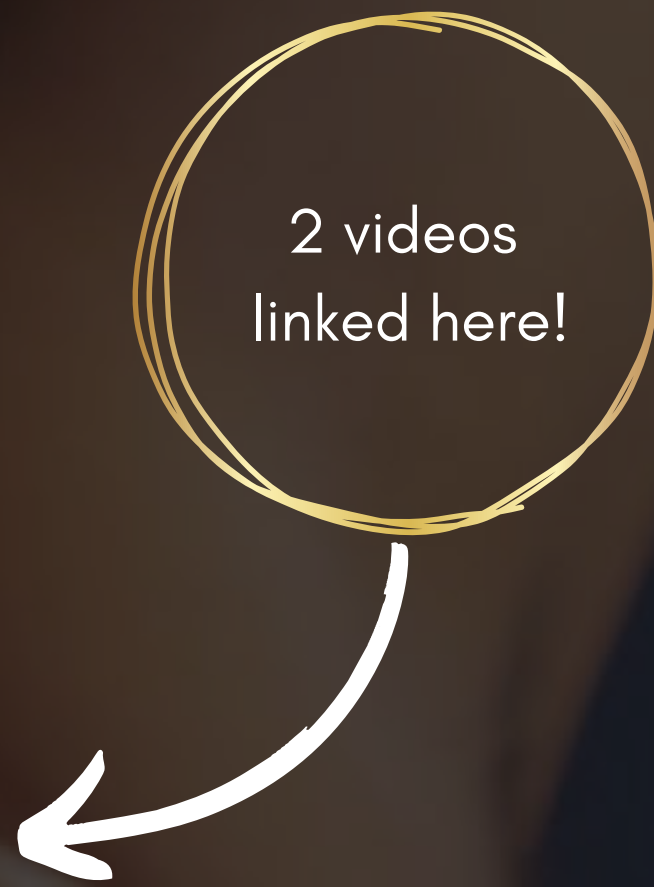
Cleavers, as we've spoke of before, is healing to the skin. Applying Cleavers to the skin is said reduce the appearance of wrinkles, and for those who do not like the appearance of freckles – this herb is purported to lessen their appearance. This plant also makes a great remedy for sunburns.



I've also mentioned the delicious sweet Vanilla-like scent of Cleavers, which is a sign of the presence of coumarins. This compound is also in Sweetgrass (*Hierochloe odorata*) and Sweet Clover (*Melilotus* species).

The combination of this scent and other plant compounds makes Cleavers a great deodorant. You can brew up an infusion to store in the refrigerator for up to one week.

You might also be able to infuse oil or plant butters (cocoa or shea) with this plant for similar effect. Another way to extend the shelf-life of the fragrance of this plant is to make a hydrosol (as we did in the Rose lesson). Then you can either use the hydrosol alone or add it as the water component in a deodorizing lotion.



2 videos  
linked here!

deodorant



# Cleavers coffee

Interestingly, Cleavers can be both stimulating and soothing to the nervous system.

Cleavers is in the Rubiaceae family, just like Coffee. And some folks make a coffee substitute from the seeds of Cleavers. The seeds are harvested once the plant dies back in summer or fall. They are then roasted, ground, and brewed just like Coffee.

The seeds are pretty small, so this takes patience!

Read and watch how to do it from Rachel Lambert, author of *Wild and Sweet*.



# genito-urinary

The seeds of Cleavers resemble other parts of the body – it doesn't take much imagination to notice!



Cleavers is a kidney remedy,  
as I've shared before.



# genito-urinary

According to herbalist Julia Graves, Cleavers is also helpful for conditions afflicting men, including...

- *cystitis that extends to the testicles*
- *inflamed, enlarged prostate*
- *hydrocele\**
- *orchitis\*\**

Cleavers has also been used as a treatment for gonorrhea.

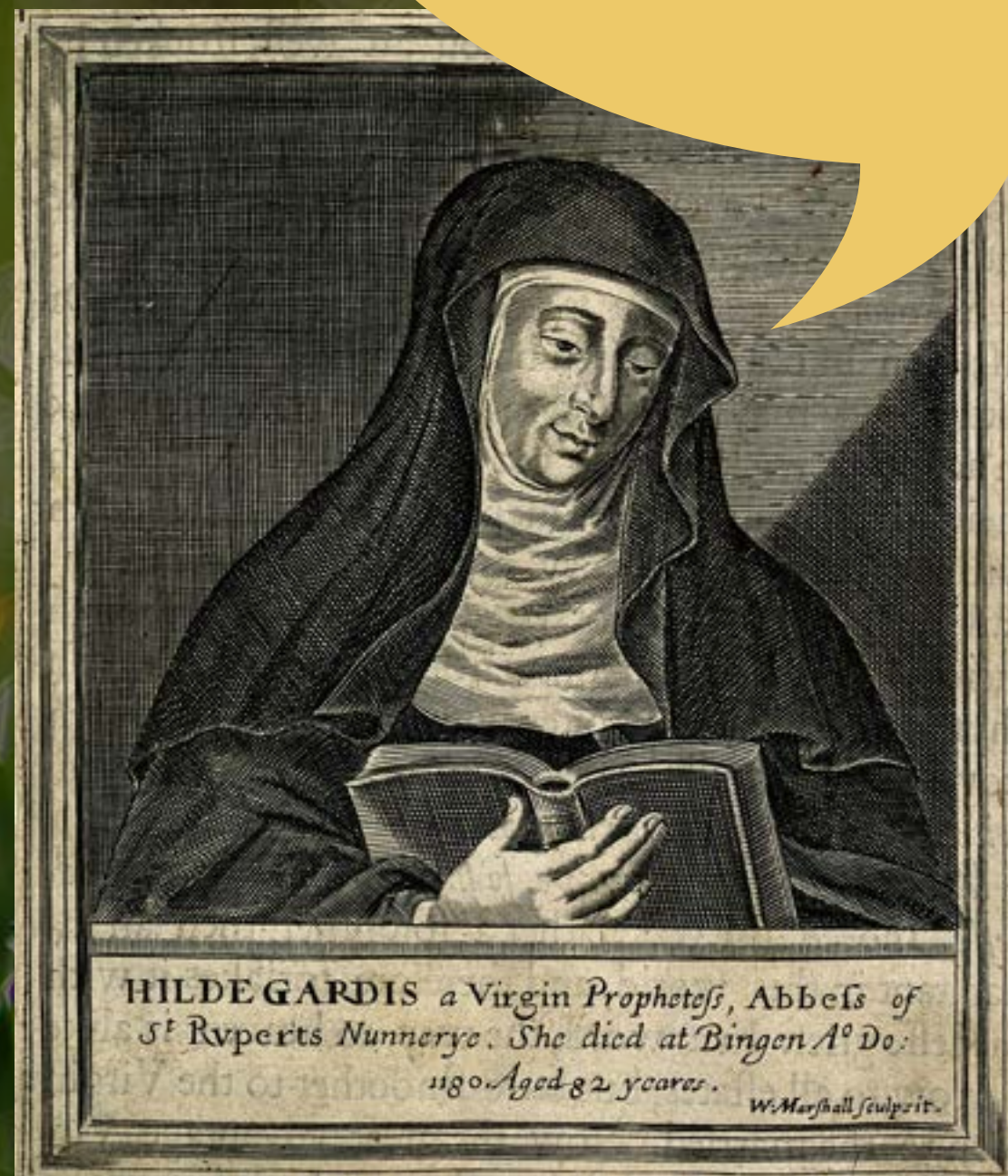
\*fluid build-up and inflammation of scrotum

\*\*inflamed testicles



Cleavers epitomizes the advice of  
12th century German abbess and  
polymath Hildegard von Bingen...

**"Stay wet and moist  
and green and juicy"**



HILDEGARDIS a Virgin Prophetess, Abbess of  
St Ruperts Nunnery. She died at Bingen A<sup>o</sup> Do:  
1180. Aged 82 years. W. Marshall sculpsit.

image: [Wellcome Images](#)

She was also known for  
her knowledge of herbs.



# juice

Cleavers is indeed a juicy plant. Due to its high water content, it tends to wither when dried. If you do intend to dry Cleavers, it's best to wait to harvest the more mature hardier plant in mid to late spring.

Juicing Cleavers is one of the most effective and common ways to receive the benefits of this plant.

The juice can be drunk, made into a succus, frozen into ice cubes, or used as a wash.



# juice

In the following video I'll show you how  
I use a blender to make Cleavers juice.





# SUCCUS

To make the juice into a succus, add enough alcohol (vodka or other spirits) so that your finished product has at least 20% alcohol by volume.

For example, if you have 1 cup of juice and have 80 proof (40% ABV) vodka, you'd add equal parts vodka to the juice for a finished ABV of 20% to stabilize it.

You can store this at room temperature, but I like to put it in the freezer or fridge, just to be on the safe side. This should keep for at least 6 months to 1 year, and maybe longer.



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# INFUSE

Cleavers (*Galium aparine*)

Gathering  
GROUND



# feels

I like to think about the very tactile nature of this plant as a way to understand the way that it can heal sensitivity, of both the skin and the nerves.

Taken internally and used topically, Cleavers can help heal eczema, psoriasis, and other inflamed, itchy, or irritated skin conditions.

Cleavers has the ability to calm the nervous system and restore vitality.

The seeds are energizing and can be roasted and brewed like coffee.



Cleavers is used as a beauty product:

as a deodorant

to reduce the appearance of wrinkles and freckles

(though who's to say these aren't beautiful things?)

beauty



# bedstraw

There are many other Galium species - 650 around the world and at least 86 of those grow on Turtle Island.

Some of them are used interchangeably with Cleavers, and many have their own specific healing attributes...



# bedstraw



Image: [GrammarFascist](#)

Rough Bedstraw (*Galium asprellum*)

Used as a diaphoretic, diuretic, and measles remedy by the Choctaw

Licorice Bedstraw (*G. circaezans*)

Taken for coughs, asthma, hoarseness by the Cherokee



Image: [Illinois Wildflowersl](#)

Shining Bedstraw (*G. concinnum*)

Infusion of whole plant used for kidney and bladder trouble, ague (fever with shivers) by the Meskwaki



Image: [Fritzflohrreynolds](#)



# bedstraw



Image: [Illinois Wildflowers](#)

Stiff Marsh Bedstraw (*Galium tinctorium*)

Infusion of whole plant used for respiratory system by the Anishinaabeg

Three-petal Bedstraw (*G. trifidum*)

Infusion used to treat eczema, ringworm, and scrofula (from tuberculosis) by the Anishinaabeg



Image: [Dalgial](#)

Oneflower Bedstraw (*G. uniflorum*)

Whole plant used as an astringent, diaphoretic, and diuretic by the Choctaw



Image: [Southeastern Flora](#)



## Fragrant Bedstraw (*Galium triflorum*)

- Urinary remedy: Infusion used for gallstones by the Cherokee; to treat kidney troubles by the Menominee; to clear up edema by the Miwok
- Used as a love medicine by the Haudenosaunee, Quileute,\* and Karuk
- Used to treat injuries/wounds by the Haudenosaunee: poultice of whole plant used to relieve backache in babies and the plant is taken with other herbs and applied as a poultice to ruptured testicles
- A poultice of the plants is applied to hair to make it grow by the Klallam, Makah, and Quinault
- Respiratory remedy: combined with Nettles or vines and Hellebore as a chest rub for chest pains by Kwakiutl



Image: [Superior National Forest](#)



\*Fun fact: the Chairman of the Quileute Tribal Council's last name is Woodruff, which is the common name for *Galium odoratum*.

Image: AnneTanne

bedstraw





## Northern Bedstraw (*Galium boreale*)

- Used as a diuretic by the Choctaw and Cree
- Used as a diaphoretic by the Choctaw
- Used as both a contraceptive and abortifacient ("deobstruent") by the Choctaw

The following video from the Native Memory Project highlights some of the uses of this plant from the perspective of a Crow elder.



bedstraw



# dye

Like its relative, Madder (*Rubia tinctorum*), the roots of Cleavers yield a pink to red dye.

And while this video isn't about either of these plants, per se, it highlights the importance of keeping traditional plant dye practices alive.



Here are two articles on dyeing with Galium  
[Here is an article on how to dye with Galium species.](#)



# dye

Here are two articles on dyeing with  
Galium if you want to try it:

[Local Color Dyes](#)

[Live Textiles \(Mi'kmaq\)](#)

And here's a whole workshop on the topic of natural dyeing:

[Native Plant Dyes of New Mexico](#)



# disclaimer

The statements herein have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. The recipes and information in this course are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease.

This course is also not meant to replace medical care. If you are in need of medical assistance, please reach out to a qualified healthcare practitioner.



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