



Self Heal

Prunella vulgaris

“There is not a better wound herbe...” - Gerard 1597

You would think that when the “old folks” called this plant such a therapeutic sort of name that it really must be good for something.

(Image: Self Heal in flower-Karina Hilterman)



Identification & Cultivation: Self Heal is in the Lamiaceae (Labiatae) or mint family, originates from Europe and Asia, and has since found its way around the globe. Indeed, it is a most useful weed, quite a prolific grower in the garden, and also an attractive ground cover.

It is an evergreen perennial with mid-green ovate pointed leaves on square stems (typical to this family) that creep along the ground, layering themselves as they go, making an effective ground cover. Self Heal grows in most conditions but prefers dappled light and not to dry out. Propagation is from root stolon or seed.

The lovely flower spikes rise above the foliage with whorls of small purple flowers. When magnified, they can be seen as hooded and lipped, surrounded by green calyces which are tinged maroon with fine white hairs. Take the time to look closely at their beauty; a magnifying glass is an excellent way to observe this beauty in miniature - a great way to show small children its delights. They flower from spring to late autumn.

Parts used: Aerial Parts (what grows above the ground), and is generally used during flowering.

Character: slightly bitter, pungent, cold, and astringent.

Constituents: Vitamin A, B, C and K; Minerals Manganese. Flavonoids, rutin, fatty acids, anthocyanadins, triterpenes, rosmarinic acid, volatile oils, bitters, saponins, alkaloids, and tannins. This traditional healer has been mainly taken for granted and not much research done on it, which is surprising actually considering its name and long traditional use. Recently though it has been “discovered” to be one of nature’s best antioxidants! Why buy tablets when you can grow a plant that is both attractive and highly beneficial.

Therapeutic actions: Anti-bacterial, vulnerary (wound healer), diuretic, astringent, hypotensive (aids lowering blood pressure), and strong antioxidant properties

The aerial parts are most commonly used in Western Herbal Medicine, though in Chinese Herbal Medicine it is just the flowers that are used.¹ They are used as a liver stimulant -- cooling, anti-bacterial -- and as an aid to reducing inflammation and fevers.² Traditionally, this herb has been used for treating cancers, boils and scrofula. There appears to be considerable interest in researching this herb within China, as most of the research papers have been published in the Chinese language, therefore have not been included as the author cannot read and interpret them.

Medicinal uses: As Self Heal is astringent, it can be used to ‘tighten’ tissue and aid with such conditions as diarrhoea, haemorrhoids (cream or ointment), heavy periods, blood in urine or bowel motions ³ – make sure you get this checked out medically first, to find what the cause is and use the remedy to help heal tissues.

As an eye wash for conjunctivitis or tired, itchy or strained eyes. As a gargle/mouthwash for sore throats and mouth or gum infections/inflammations. Traditionally, it is used as a poultice or compress for clean wounds.³

For its antioxidant properties – eat it! Mind you, the leaves are a bit ‘rough’, so either chop it finely and mix into salad or sandwich, or put through a juicer with something you really enjoy. Up to 10 fresh leaves daily is quite beneficial.

Use as an infusion – as a herb tea with other herbs you enjoy; as a general tonic and an aid to lowering blood pressure; soothing and healing to the digestive system.

A strong infusion added to syrup is a beneficial way to treat sore throats. Gargle well then swallow. Topically it is useful for stings and bites, ulcers and varicose veins.

Other Uses: Prunella as a homeopathic remedy is prescribed for bowel problems, including colitis. As a flower essence, Self Heal is used to “enhance our own healing powers, body mind and soul and helps us stand on our own feet by helping us to be more self-motivated and independent”.

History & Mystery: Culpeper listed Self Heal as ruled by Venus.

Also known as all-heal, carpenters herb, heart of the earth, wound wort, blue curls, sickle wort. From German the name die Breaune or brunellen, from the word for quinsy which is a throat infection. Brunella was the Medieval Latin word for tonsillitis, which Self Heal was and still is used for.

“...When you are hurt, you may heal yourself... it is an especial herb for inward or outward wounds. Take it inwardly in syrups for inward wounds, outwardly in unguents and plasters for outward wounds.” - Culpeper 1616-1664²

(Image: The Self Heal Fairy, by Cicely Mary Barker from *Wayside Flower Fairies* 1948)



References:

1. Lu, H. C. (1994). *Chinese Natural Cures: Traditional Methods for Remedies and Preventions* (4th ed.). New York: Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers Inc.
2. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Bashir-Ganai/publication/277687024_Prunella_vulgaris_L_A_Literature_Review_on_its_Therapeutic_Potentials/links/572cc92808aee02297597c9d/Prunella-vulgaris-L-A-Literature-Review-on-its-Therapeutic-Potentials.pdf
3. Ody, P. (2000). *The Complete Guide Medicinal Herbal* (2nd Edition). London: Dorling Kindersley.
4. Fisher C. and Painter G. *Materia Medica of Western Herbs for the Southern Hemisphere*, 1996
5. Culpeper, N. (1981 (originally published 1653)). *Culpeper's Complete Herbal and English Physician*: Harvey Sales, reproduced from an original edition published in 1826.

Prepared for the Herb Federation of New Zealand's Herb Awareness Month 2026 by Karina Hilterman.
Enquiries: www.herbs.org.nz

Advisory Note: This text is given as a general guidance. If any adverse reactions occur or symptoms persist, please contact a qualified medical herbalist or medical doctor immediately.