



Second Nature

By Lucia Kloster

You've probably walked by this plant every day and not noticed it, or you may have tried to rid your lawn or sidewalk of it thinking it was a pesky weed. But don't be so quick to weed this magical plant out. Did you know the young spring leaves can be added to your salads for extra vitamin C, K, zinc and potassium? Did you also know that the more mature leaves of the *Plantago major* are one of nature's most abundant first aid remedies? Imagine, a first aid remedy ready and available for you to use right there at your feet, literally.

Plantago major, also known as broadleaf plantain, is not to be confused with the much larger banana. *Plantago* has an affinity to grow where we walk, so it is easily found. It is a small herbaceous perennial, has many oval-shaped glossy leaves with 5 to 7 strong veins throughout each leaf, and is a member of the *Plantaginaceae* family. Their beautiful flowers are not showy, growing up from the center of the rosette arranged leaves. They're about 5 to 10 inches tall and on each spike are many green flowers that are wind pollinated. When mature, they will produce an abundance of seeds.

So, what makes this plant stand out from the others? *Plantago* has a powerful ability to draw out the venom from a bee sting and even a spider bite. It has also been known to draw out splinters and the venom from

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snakes. It can be used on minor skin irritations, cuts, scrapes and if that's not all, it is also very cooling to minor burns including sunburns.

To release the medicinal properties of the Plantago, the leaves will need to be crushed or macerated. The juices from the leaf then are applied to the affected area. For a quick remedy, my kids love to chew the leaves and spit it on their bug bites for almost instant relief. If that is too gross for you, you could make a poultice by adding a handful of leaves to the blender with a splash of water, blend on high and then apply the poultice. Before going on a hike, we often pick a small handful of Plantago leaves and stick them in our pockets or small plastic bags just in case.

But wait, there's more. Want an even more cooling remedy for a hot itchy rash or sunburn? Take a ready-made Plantago poultice and spoon it into ice cube trays and freeze overnight. Want some for the winter? No problem. Here is a simple recipe to make your own Plantago healing salve.

When gathering any plant whether edible or medicinal, don't forget to make sure you have correctly identified the plant. It is also important to gather only clean and chemically free leaves, not from sprayed lawns or beside roadways.



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Homemade Plantago Healing Salve

The folk method process below takes time but is worth the effort. From gathering the leaves to the end result of a healing salve it can take up to 4 to 6 weeks. In the end, it is very satisfying to know you have made your own herbal remedy from a plant in your own yard.

First you will need to gather 3 to 4 cups of fresh Plantago leaves. They will need to be dried. You can lay them flat on a clean screen, wicker basket or even paper towels. Once the leaves are completely dry, crush them, and add them to a clean and dry pint-sized glass jar. Fill to about $\frac{3}{4}$ way full. Pour in olive oil to cover making sure all plant material is below the oil. Cover, place the jar in the sun and mix every day for up to four weeks. After about four weeks, strain using a wire mesh strainer or cheesecloth and, ta da, you have your own rich herbal infused oil.

Now for the salve:

- 4 oz. Plantago infused olive oil
- 1 oz. grated beeswax (vegan option, carnauba wax)
- 10 drops of lavender essential oil (optional)

In a double boiler on medium heat, melt the beeswax. Add the infused oil and stir. If you desire, add in the essential oil. Pour the liquid into small clean jars or tins. Cover and let sit until cooled. Label each container with ingredients and date. Apply generously when needed. And remember, herbal remedies are not a substitute for medical help, please seek medical attention when necessary.

Second Nature is submitted by the naturalists at Bonnyvale Environmental Education Center in West Brattleboro. BEEC offers Nature Explorers Summer Camp for young people ages 5 to 11. There are still openings in our Emerging Naturalist camps for ages 8 to 11. Visit BEEC.org for more information, registration and current events. BEEC is a member supported non-profit organization.

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