

Cleavers

The botanical name for this plant is *Galium aparine*, and it is a herbaceous annual from the family Rubiaceae

This is one of the species found in the Hedge study, and was identified right from the first day of the study in January. Cleavers prefer moist soil and are often found in hedgerows.



The above photograph was of a portion of a cleaver plant picked in January for the hedge study.

Appearance

Cleavers have creeping straggly stems which twine themselves around other plants as it branches and grows. They can grow up to 6 metres in length and are a vigorous weed in gardens, but very easy to pull up.

Leaves: .

Cleavers have tiny hooked hairs on their stems and leaves which

help them to attach itself to anything it touches. The leaves grow out from joints and are whorled and stalk-less. They are narrow in shape and covered in tiny hooked hairs.

Flowers:



Cleaver flower picked near Manning's Pit,
mid May

Cleaver flowers are tiny and not often noticed. They are white and star-shaped and appear in clusters, emerging from side branches in spring or early summer.

Flowers can be inconspicuous as they are very small (1mm long and 1-2mm across). They are white with four petals and fused together at their base. Flowers are arranged in small spreading clusters (1 - 9 flowers) on short side branches. They have four tiny yellow stamens and flowers occur mostly from late spring into summer.

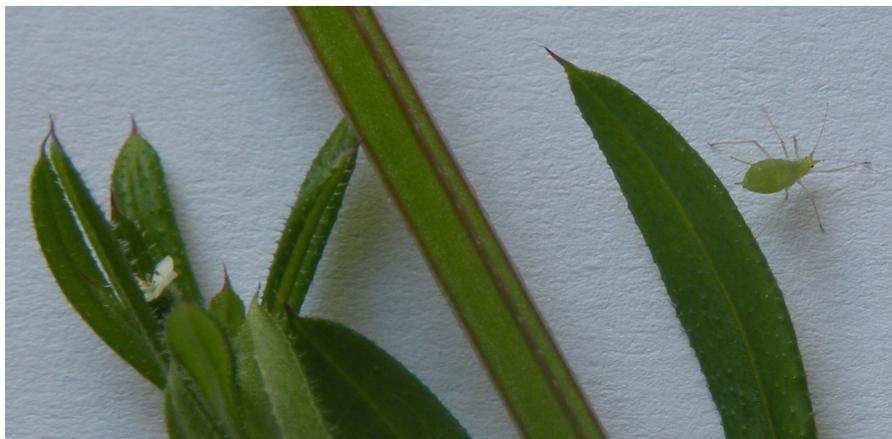
Fruits:



Cleaver fruits, with a tiny fly on a leaf

Like the stems and leaves, the fruits (globular shaped and known as burrs) are covered with hooked hairs, which help them to stick on to animal hairs and become dispersed away from the parent plant.

Value to Wildlife:



On the left, a flower, on the right, an aphid.

Many insects such as aphids feed on cleavers. Spittlebugs are another, and scientists are calling for volunteers to record sighting of the beetles, and their tell-tale “spittle” also known as cuckoo-spit, because of fears of infestation from Europe with a deadly plant disease called Xylella which can be spread by such insects. Geese are said to be especially fond of eating cleavers, which is why they have the common name “goose-grass” (among many other names, such as bedstraw, catchweed, and robin-run-the-hedge.)

Interesting Facts about Cleavers

Cleavers are edible – but we must add a warning - some people develop a rash when eating cleavers!

The leaves and stems can be cooked if picked before the flowers appear, but the hooks make them awkward to eat raw. Cleavers come from the same family as coffee and their fruits can be dried and roasted to make a coffee substitute which contains less caffeine.

Poultices made from cleavers have been used to treat various skin problems such as burns and wounds, their pulp can relieve skin irritation caused by poisonous bites. They can also be made into a tea (said to be therapeutic) using the dried leaves.

The ancient Greek shepherds used the stems of cleavers to make a sieve for straining milk, a practice that apparently occurred in more recent times in Sweden.

The dried stems have been used to fill mattresses (hence the name bedstraw) and the roots can be used to make a red dye. The flowers from cleavers were used to curdle milk when making cheese.

Sources:

Wikipedia

www.ediblewildfood.com/cleavers.aspx

gardenorganic.org.uk

For details of how to make cleaver coffee, go to our Cook Book,
and also

“Making coffee from cleaver/goosegrass seeds” on You Tube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cLYWhMDhwDs>

(RachelLambertsWildFoodForaging)

More links below:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fbvg__PtahU

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cY_yNhkqNps

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8kir6b-8lyE>

(includes herbal uses)