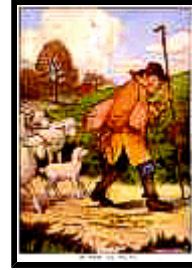
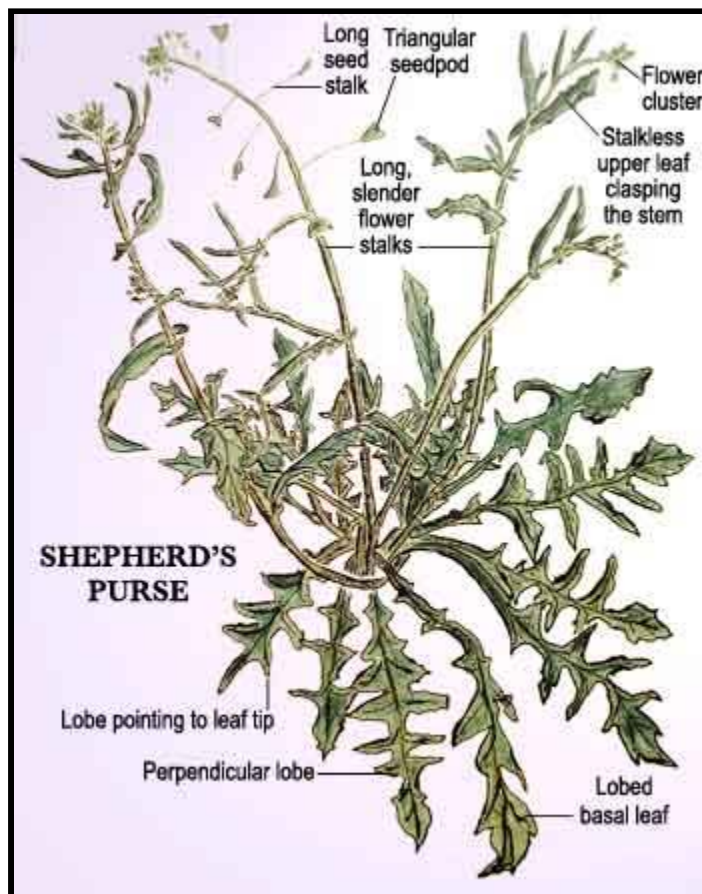


[Overview of This Book](#), [More Excerpts](#), [Reviews of this Book](#), [Other Books](#), [More Plants](#),
[Buy this Book](#), [Home](#)

SHEPHERD'S PURSE *(Capsella bursa-pastoris)*



From *SHOOTS AND GREENS
OF EARLY SPRING
in Northeastern North America*



Shepherd's Purse

Note the deeply toothed basal leaves, and the stalkless upper leaves clasping the stem.

DESCRIPTION: Shepherd's purse begins with a basal rosette (circle of bottom leaves) of deeply toothed leaves up to 9 inches across, broader toward the tip, like the dandelion, but without white, milky sap, and with more blunt teeth pointing outward,

not toward the leaf's base. The slender, white taproot contrasts with dandelion's stout, beige one.

The little-branched, slender, erect flower stalk grows up to 2½ feet tall in mid-spring, with smaller, alternate (singly configured), stalkless leaves clasping the stem with 2 small, pointed lobes.

The tiny, white, 4-petaled flowers, whose petals form a cross, like related mustards, alternate around the tip of the stalk.

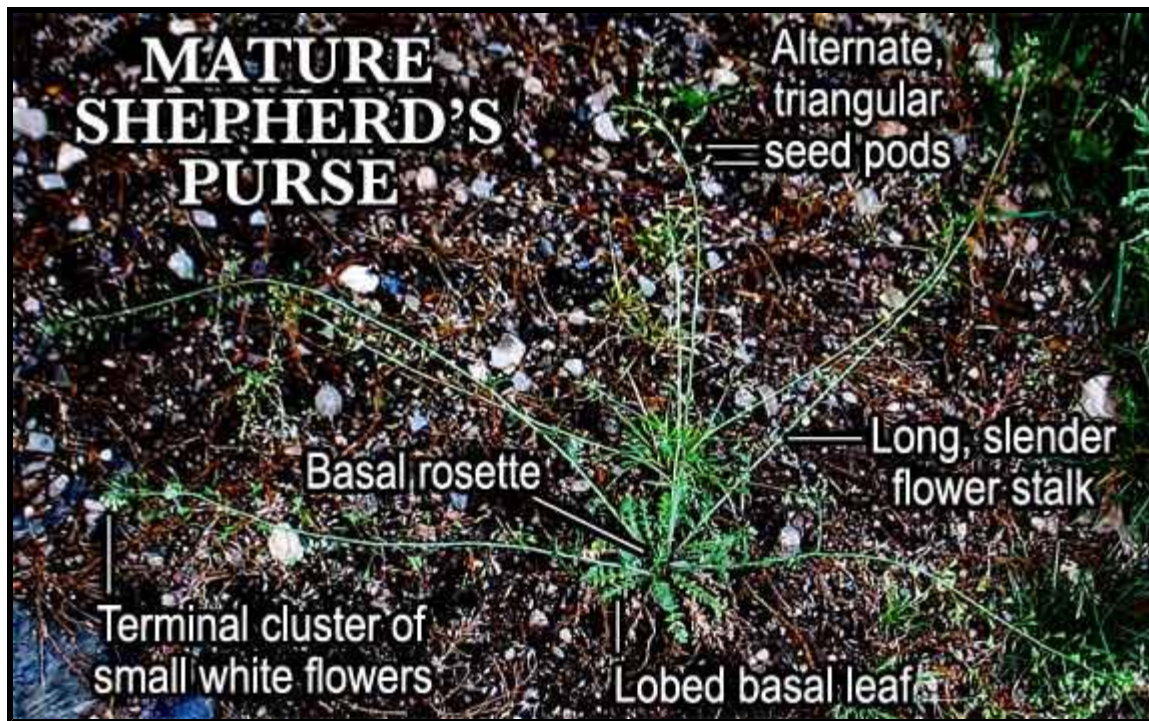
The flowers give way to long-stemmed, flattened, triangular, 2-parted seedpods ½ inch long that supposedly resemble the purses of ancient shepherds. If you ever run into an ancient shepherd while collecting shepherd's purse, let me know if it's true. Although shepherd's purse has no poisonous look-alikes, be sure that the ancient shepherd doesn't view your botanical studies of his purse as the work of a pickpocket or crook, and bop you one on the noggin with the crook of his staff!



Shepherd's Purse Basal Rosette

The teeth point outward or upward, not downward, like the [dandelion's](#).

HABITAT: Shepherd's purse grows on disturbed soil, in unmowed meadows and lawns, and along roadsides and trails.



SEASON: Eat this annual's tender, young basal leaves in March and early April, before the plant flowers. Sometimes edible new leaves come up in late fall too. Either they're fooled by short nights (which stimulate germination), similar to early spring, or they just haven't read the other field guides that list this as a springtime-only plant.



FOOD USES: Uncharacteristically mild for a mustard green, the leaves benefit from plenty of seasonings. Add them raw to salads; simmer in soups, stews, and sauces; or sauté or steam them. They cook in about 10 minutes, and shrink by about 75%. I find the seedpods and the tiny, spherical seeds inside the mature pods to be without flavor, although they are reputedly peppery.

NUTRITION: Shepherd's purse leaves provide vitamins C, A, and K; some protein; the minerals sulfur, calcium, iron, potassium, and sodium; the flavonoid rutin; and the neurotransmitter acetylcholine.

MEDICINAL USES: Used to reduce fertility (and to strengthen uterine contraction during childbirth) in China, it's supposed to be an astringent, making tissue contract and stopping all manner of bleeding, from external scratches and nosebleeds to internal hemorrhages.

It's reputed to be good for diarrhea (an astringent would tighten loose bowels), and to act as a diuretic for kidney disease. I haven't seen these claims confirmed or refuted, but it didn't work on my paper cut, so I wouldn't use it for more serious conditions without proof.

FEATURED RECIPE:

[Early Spring Salad with Creamy Lemon Dressing](#)

[Overview of This Book](#), [More Excerpts](#), [Reviews of this Book](#), [Other Books](#), [More Plants](#),
[Buy this Book](#), [Home](#), [Back to the Top](#)