

Good King Henry

(*Chenopodium bonus-henricus*)

Traditional Uses & Recipes

Why 'Good King Henry'? Theories abound: some link it to Henry VIII (perhaps because it was a favourite at court), others trace it back further to earlier kings or even a corruption of older names. Whatever the truth, the plant itself is undeniably 'good' — generous, undemanding, and always there.

Historical Uses

Good King Henry was a staple food for rural households from medieval times through the 18th century. It was valued for its versatility, nutritional content, and reliability during food shortages.

Edible Parts

- Young leaves (spring greens)
- Shoots (asparagus substitute)
- Seeds (grain extender)
- Roots (occasionally, when cooked)

Culinary Uses

- Cooked greens similar to spinach
- Added to soups, stews, and pottages
- Used as pie and dumpling fillings
- Seeds ground into meal or flour
- Mixed with grains during shortages

Basic Preparation Notes

- Always cook leaves to reduce oxalates
- Seeds should be washed before cooking or milling
- Best flavor comes from young growth

Traditional Recipes

Spring Greens Pottage

Ingredients:

- Good King Henry leaves
- Onions or leeks
- Oats or barley
- Salt

Method:

Simmer all ingredients until thick and nourishing.

Poor Man's Asparagus

Ingredients:

- Young flowering shoots
- Butter or animal fat
- Salt

Method:

Boil shoots briefly, drain, and serve with butter.

Seed Meal Porridge

Ingredients:

- Ground Good King Henry seeds
- Water or milk
- Salt or honey

Method:

Cook gently, stirring constantly until thick.

Medicinal & Household Uses

- Leaves used as poultices for wounds and swelling
- Mild laxative when eaten in quantity
- Spring tonic after winter scarcity

Modern Use

Today, Good King Henry is rediscovered by permaculture growers and heritage gardeners as a low-input, perennial food plant well-suited to resilient food systems.