

Shepherd's Purse

Capsella bursa-pastoris (L.) Medik.

Alternate Names

Pepper plant, shepherd's-pouch, pick pocket, mother's-heart, St. James weed, caseweed, pick-purse, witches' pouches, toothwort, shovel-plant

Description

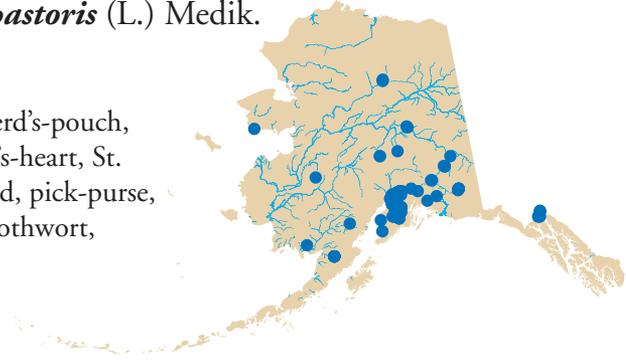
Shepherd's purse is an annual plant that can grow 4–20 inches high. It has a rosette of basal leaves 1–8 inches long and a thin, branching taproot. Stem leaves are alternate and clasping. Flowers are white and small, with petals $\frac{1}{16}$ – $\frac{3}{16}$ of an inch long. Seedpods are $\frac{1}{8}$ – $\frac{3}{8}$ of an inch long and distinctively heart-shaped. The fruiting stem elongates as the fruit matures.

Similar Species

A native mustard, lyrate rockcress (*Arabis lyrata* L.), has white flowers and is commonly found in dry, open areas. It can be distinguished from shepherd's purse by the shape of its fruit, which is narrow, $\frac{1}{2}$ – $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, and $\frac{1}{32}$ – $\frac{1}{16}$ of an inch wide.

Management

Shepherd's purse is easily pulled up by hand, although several weedings may be necessary to eliminate plants germinating from buried seeds (Densmore et al. 2001), which can remain viable for longer than 20 years (J. Conn, pers. comm. 2005).



Shepherd's purse basal leaves.

National Park Service photo by Jeff Heys

Family: Brassicaceae

Shepherd's Purse

Notes

Shepherd's purse originated in Europe and is often one of the first plants to flower in the spring. It is the only mustard in North America with triangular fruits.



National Park Service photo by Penny Bauder

Shepherd's purse flowers and fruits.