

VNPS Piedmont Chapter WILDFLOWER of the WEEK

WILDFLOWER #23 Answer: HEAL-ALL (*Prunella vulgaris*)

Also called Self-heal and Heart of the earth, Heal-all is a world traveler. It thrives in Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America. Roman legions are said to have carried it along on campaigns. The introduced variety in North America has wider leaves and prefers lawns and gardens; the native with narrower leaves is more common in woods. The two hybridize readily, so they are still one species.

Heal-all was reputed to cure many illnesses, especially quinsy, a deadly infection around the tonsils. (George Washington died of it.) The name *Prunella* might come from *die Bräune*, the German word for quinsy. Among a plethora of chemical compounds, Heal-all does contain the healing vitamins C, K, and B1.

Or the name might come from the Latin for "little plum," because of its color. Look more closely at heal-all to see the touch of plummy red on its square stem. Each flower has two lips—the top a hood, the bottom three-lobed with a fringe pointing up on the middle lobe. The bract cradling each flower is apt to be reddish, too. The flower, though, is purple, or rarely white.

Roses, daisies, and lilies have an unfair share of literature, but a white Heal-all has its own odd spotlight in Robert Frost's poem "Design."

WILDFLOWER #24

Clues: This leathery evergreen fern turns purple-brown in winter. It holds aloft its tall fertile leaf, with spores in tan globes.



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