

Australian Fife Canary

Greens & Weeds; a must for Healthy Birds

by Peter Ailwood

Greens & Weeds will not cover all the available greens & weeds that can be found in the garden or the supermarket, as there are too many. However I will endeavour to cover a wide range of easily obtainable plants. This series will not cover seeding grasses, a whole other area of learning. The definition of weed is quite difficult as some weeds are regarded as herbs, however on the other hand all herbs are not weeds, or so I'm told.

The first I will cover is in my opinion the most important weed **NOT** to feed to your birds as it is **DEADLY**. I am referring to *Euphorbia peplus*, which is known to me as Petty Spurge.

Petty Spurge (*Euphorbia peplus*)

Also known as, radium weed, wart weed, milkweed, and cancer weed. Petty Spurge is a small annual which grows to about 30cm (12") high, it resembles a small tree with small leaves. It grows mainly in the temperate & subtropical regions. The most distinguishing characteristic is that when the leaves and stem are broken it oozes a milky latex. The sap does have some medical uses that are being researched for humans not birds. The sap burns and if it gets into your eyes, you must wash and seek medical advice, as it can blind.

Petty Spurge is often found amongst other excellent foods such as Chickweed; be careful it only takes one leaf about 3mm² to kill a canary.



Chickweed (*Stellaria media*)



Chickweed (*Stellaria media*)

This is a low-growing, trailing weed. It is very high in protein and minerals. Usually found in the garden in spring and early summer, later in cooler climates.

This is an excellent green food that really is not a weed but a natural herb. It can be used by humans in salads, soups or as a herbal tea. It can also be used in a poultice for rashes and sores. It is also said to discourage fat retention.

For Canaries, feed as much and as often as you like, but be careful that it doesn't have Petty Spurge mixed with it, as they can often be found growing in the same locations. Petty spurge has white sap; chickweed on the other hand has clear sap. Chickweed is flat to the ground; Petty Spurge stands up like a tree.

I have found chickweed excellent to encourage a reluctant hen to feed egg food to new chicks. I mix a small quantity of chickweed leaves with a small quantity of egg & biscuit and in a short time (around 1 day), you

can change to 100% egg & biscuit, and the hen will keep feeding.

I have also found that the birds will usually fight over the chickweed first, if they are provided with a number of different greens at once, Reference: www.maleny.net.au

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Thistle (*sonchus oleraceus*)

Also known as, Smooth sow-thistle. Comes in many slight variations, however the following features are always present. Grows to about 90cm (3ft) high when mature. Has a hollow stem and branches; the sap is a milky juice. It gets numerous flowers, which are pale yellow. The leaves are a greenish blue and may appear slightly spiky on the edges, but this is not always present. Canaries love all parts of the plant including the roots. Hens particularly like feeding portions of the flower to young chicks. The European Goldfinch is also particularly fond of the flowers. You can feed any quantity of thistle at any stage of plant growth, from just a few inches to fully-grown.

Often the base of the flower which a soft white down, will be used by the hens as a nesting material.

This is another plant that is used as a herbal medicine.

The young leaves may be eaten in salads etc, however I wouldn't recommend.



Dandelion (*taraxacum officinale*)

This I would call a weed. It can be found in most gardens and when pulled out, if you leave part of the root it will re-grow.



This weed however, is another used as an alternate medicine; as a diuretic and for removing obstructions of the liver, gall bladder & spleen. The young leaves can be used in salads and the roots can be boiled down in water to make a tonic. You can also buy dandelion coffee from health food stores. Another name for this plant is *Piss-a-bed*, probably because it makes you want to go a lot.

For Canaries you can feed both the leaves and the roots and there isn't many Canaries that will leave anything behind.

If you wish to make a tonic you can boil down the following:

Ingredients

30gm of dried root or 120gm of cleaned green root.

1 litre of water

Method.

Boil down until volume has reduced by half ie. now 500ml

Filter out remainder of roots.

Serve

Give as a tonic to Canaries 1ml to 100ml of water

As a human tonic, I am definitely not qualified to say. If you require further information consult a herbalist.

SPECIAL NOTE: When collecting weeds make sure they have not been sprayed with insecticide or herbicide. Herbicide cannot be washed off and could prove fatal.

Remember to wash purchased greens to also remove residual pesticides.

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DOCK (*Rumex Obtusifolius*)

Dock has large leaves about a foot (30 cm) long, the whole plant reaching two to three feet (60 to 90 cm) in height. The leaves grow from a central stem which eventually flowers. The sap of this plant is clear and sticky.

It often grows at the roadside, and in drains & waste land; it likes a rich damp soil & flowers from spring to autumn, however these flowers are more like seed cases which turn brown.

Various mixtures using dock are available from the herbalist.

For Canaries I have found, that it is not their favourite plant and will be easily left if other weeds are offered at the same time.

CHOY SUM (*Brassica parachinensis*)

Chinese: Choy Sum **Japanese:** Saishin

Choy Sum is a vegetable readily available from the green grocer or supermarket, or you can grow yourself. It is perhaps the most common form of Chinese green. It is distinguished by the small yellow flowering heads that protrude from the bunch of leaves that are green, sometimes tinged yellow.

For Canaries, you can feed all the plant. The birds will spend many hours picking away at the harder stems. Remember to wash well before use, to remove the residue of any pesticide.

Refer NSW Agriculture for more information.



BOK CHOY

Brassica rapa var. *Chinensis*

Chinese: Bok choy



Another vegetable readily available from the green grocer or supermarket. The leaves of Bok Choy are tightly clustered together at the base where the stems are broad and generally white. The dark green leaves are spoon shaped and upright in the cluster. There is also a Green Leaf variety, which has green stalks, and a smaller variety.

Bok Choy is available the year round, and is marketed wholesale in bunches of two or three heads. Baby Bok Choy is marketed in bunches of a dozen.

Like Choy Sum you can feed the whole plant.

Refer NSW Agriculture for more information.

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