

# *Capsella bursa-pastoris* (L.) Medik.

Standardized Common Name: Shepherd's Purse

**Family:** Brassicaceae (Cruciferae)

**Parts in Commerce:** Whole herb (including stems, leaves, flowers and fruits)

**Identification:**

- Stem <3 mm thick, terete to angled, grooved, glabrous or sparsely pubescent on lower part
- Most leaves in basal rosette, oblanceolate, 5–7 (–15) cm long, pinnatifid to entire, with pubescent margins
- Stem leaves few, small, with clasping auriculate bases, sparsely pubescent
- Inflorescence racemose
- Fruit a silicle, green, flattened, 4–10 mm long, heart-shaped to triangular; apex broad, notched, with rounded corners

- Petals 4, usually 2–3 mm long, about twice as long as sepals, not <2 or >4 mm long
- Petals white, not yellowish, not with red margin
- Odor weak, unpleasant
- Taste weak, salty and astringent

**Adulterants:** Adulteration is not typically seen; the fruit shape is distinctive and easily identifies the genus. In theory, European material might be contaminated with at least two other species. *Capsella orientalis* Klokov has a densely hairy stem and yellowish petals; *C. grandiflora* Boiss. is larger and has larger flowers. The support for treating plants with short, red-tinged petals as *C. rubella* Reut. rather than *C. bursa-pastoris* is doubtful (although that treatment is accepted here).

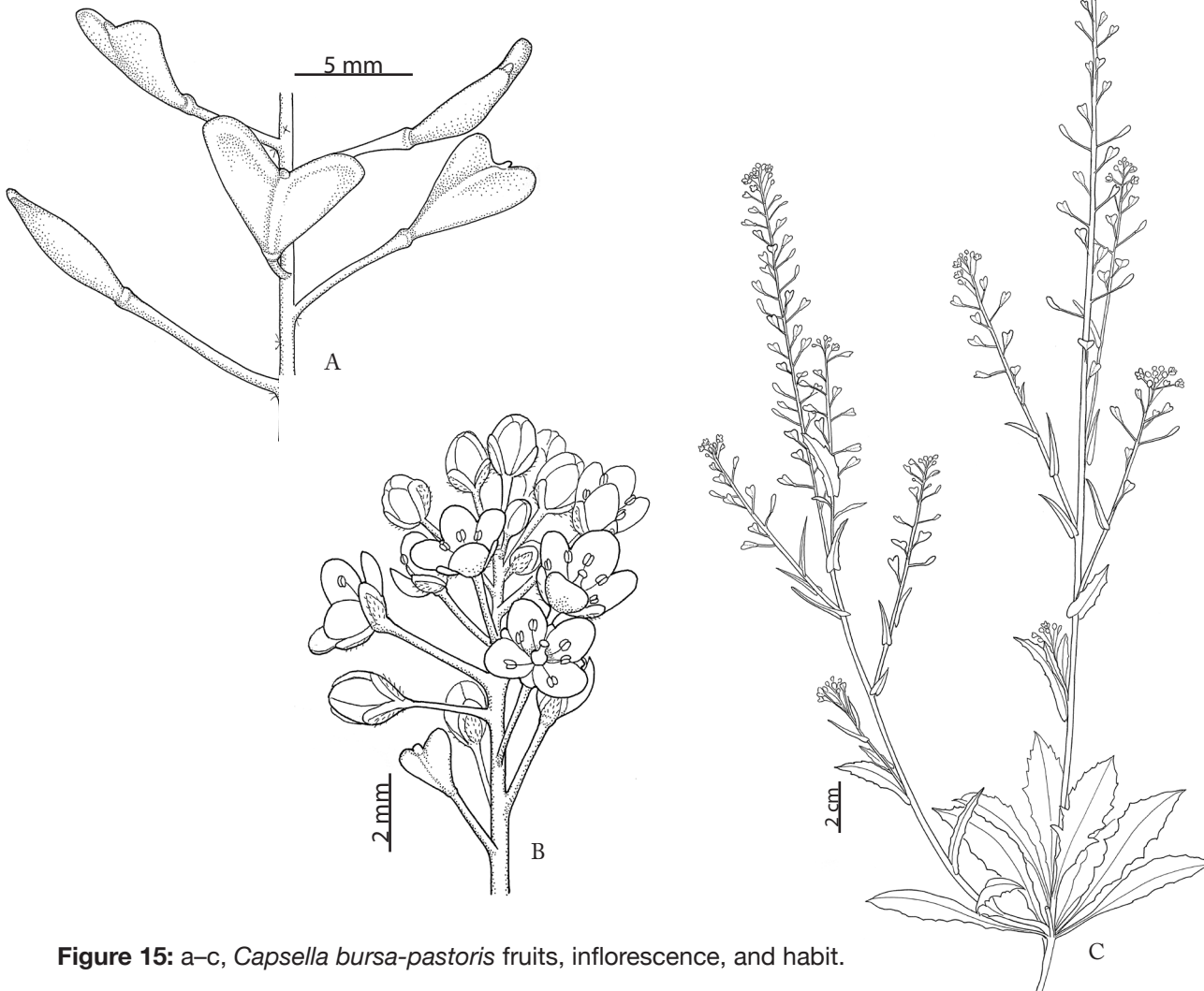


Figure 15: a–c, *Capsella bursa-pastoris* fruits, inflorescence, and habit.

**Taxonomy:** *Capsella* includes about five species of small, weedy herbs. *Capsella bursa-pastoris* is a cosmopolitan, variable complex within which literally hundreds of subspecies, varieties, microspecies, and so forth have been described. Its appearance has been shown to vary greatly in response to environmental factors, complicating attempts to name regional variants.

**Description:** Annual herb. Stem erect, occasionally branched, 30–40(–80) cm high. Leaves in basal rosette and alternate on stem; basal leaves petiolate, 5–7(–15) cm long, oblanceolate, pinnatifid or entire, margins ciliate; cauline leaves few, small, sessile, with bases clasping and auriculate; sparsely pubescent, some hairs stellately branched. Inflorescences racemose, with long pedicels. Flowers 2–3 mm across; sepals 4, <2 mm long, pale green to reddish, often sparsely pubescent; petals 4, white, 2–3 mm long; stamens 6, 2 shorter. Fruit a silicle, 4–10 mm long

and broad, obcordate to triangular, flattened, pale green to yellow-green, glabrous, shiny, 2-loculed with replum running from notch to base; seeds reddish-brown, 10–12 per locule.

**References:**

Aksoy A, Hale WHG, Dixon JM. Towards a simplified taxonomy of *Capsella bursa-pastoris* (L.) Medik. (Brassicaceae). *Watsonia*. 1999;22:243–250.

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