



The Herb Handbook

"A practical guide to using and growing herbs"

By Simone McGrath



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and growing
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Disclaimer

This e-book is intended as an introduction to how some herbs are used for medicinal and culinary uses. It is intended for educational purposes only. Herbs should not be used in the place of traditional medical care, used with pharmaceutical medicine or taken during pregnancy. If any reaction to herbs occurs that is of concern to you, contact your trained herbal practitioner or doctor.

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Introduction

Botanically, “herb” refers to any annual or perennial plant with a non-woody stem. However, the term herb has come to cover plants that have a specific benefit to mankind. Some even consider them to be the highest quality food known to the human race. We have been using herbs for thousands of years,

both for flavoring food and for healing. They're versatile, easy to grow – either in the garden or in pots on the window sill – and can be used fresh, dried or frozen.

Herbs have a variety of uses including culinary, medicinal, or in some cases even spiritual usage. For culinary purposes, the green, leafy part of the plant is typically used, but for herbal medicine the roots, flowers, seeds, root bark, inner bark (cambium), berries and sometimes the pericarp or other portions of the plant are also used.

When you think of herbs, common herbs such as Basil, Parsley and Rosemary come to mind. But there's a wealth of herbs that are not so common: herbs that have a myriad of uses. In this book, we have attempted to introduce some common as well as some relatively unknown herbs and discuss their properties, uses, cultivation strategies and much more.



Growing Herbs for Beginners

Even though herbs have an air of mystery around them owing to their culinary, medicinal and ornamental properties, growing herbs is not as mystifying. In fact, herbs are great for fledgling gardeners as it is easier to grow herbs than to grow vegetables. Most herbs are relatively pest and disease-free and require little more than adequate sunlight, and moderately fertile and well-drained soil to flourish.

Herbs fall under three major categories — Annuals, Biennials and Perennials.

Annuals:

Annual herbs bloom only once in a year and perish after that. Anise, Basil, Coriander, Chervil, Dill, and Borage are some examples of annual herbs.

Biennials:

Just as the name suggests, biennial herbs are the ones that survive for two seasons (two years). Caraway, Evening Primrose and Parsley are examples of biennial herbs. They produce leaves in the first season and flowers and seeds in the second season after which the plant does not survive.

Perennials:

Perennial herbs are the ones that survive more than two growing seasons. Most culinary herbs such as Chives, Fennel, Marjoram, Mints, Oregano, Rosemary, Tarragon, Lavender, Sage, Savory, Thyme, etc are perennials. These types of herbs gain maturity in the second year while growing at a slow pace in the first year.

Outdoor Herb Gardening

Your own herb garden adds a special touch to your home cooked meals. Whether it is fresh Basil for spaghetti sauce or pesto, Lemongrass for your favorite Thai dish or Lavender to make an exotic potpourri, you can grow them all in your backyard. It is not at all difficult to grow and maintain your herb garden, all you need is some patience, perseverance and planning.

Choosing a Site: Site and Soil Condition

Each herb has specific requirements to grow best. Basic factors like exposure to sunlight, soil fertility and moisture as well as other plants surrounding the herbs form a major portion of these requirements.

Ideally, a site that you choose for growing herbs should get at least 4 to 6 hours of sunlight each day. The soil should not be excessively wet, most herbs prefer well-drained soil. However, some herbs like Sage, Rosemary and Thyme can tolerate moderately moist soil. You can improve the quality of poorly-drained soil by adding sand or compost. A word of caution - do it in moderation, as the soil can get too rich and get susceptible to diseases.

You do not need highly fertile soil; low to moderately fertile soil is good enough for the herbs to flourish. Additional fertilizer is often not required. In some cases, highly fertile soil can produce a large number of leaves with poor flavor.

Determining the Size of Your Herb Garden

The size of your herb garden will depend upon the number of varieties of herbs you want to have in your garden. You may allot 12-by-18 inch plots for each herb in the garden. If you wish to make a kitchen garden then a 20-by-4 feet area should be adequate. Ideally, keep annual and perennial herbs apart.

Sowing Seeds

Seeds are the most common source for propagation and proper sowing is vital for the optimal growth of the herb. You may get the seeds from local nursery farms, farmer's markets, gardening supply stores, or by procuring seeds online.

Before sowing, clear the soil-bed of stones, debris and weeds up to 6-12 inches deep and then level it. Sow the seeds by broadcasting (scattering) or systematic drilling in rows, depending on the herb's requirement. Once seeds are sprinkled, rake the ground and water it adequately. Ensure that the water does not wash away the soil.

Seeds may be sown directly in the ground or in containers, pots, seed trays *etc.* Seeds should not be sown too deep into the soil as they may fail to germinate.

Usually, spring is the ideal time for sowing, especially in the case of annual herbs. Biennials can be planted in late spring and perennials can be grown at any time of the year. Seeds that are sensitive to frost may be sown indoors during winter and then seedlings may be transplanted outdoors in the spring. However, some herbs like Anise, Fennel and Dill cannot be well-transplanted and so their seeds should be sown directly in the garden. Herbs like Mint propagate themselves, slowly occupying the entire garden. To control their rampant ways, they are planted in bottomless containers sunk into the soil.

Ensure that you keep adequate distance between two plants so that they can flourish.

Cutting and Division

Herbs can also be grown through the cutting and division method. This method especially works well for those herbs that take longer to germinate from seeds. Herbs like Mint, Tarragon, Chives, Savory, Lovage, and Lemon Balm are successfully propagated through root division. Lavender, Scented Geranium and Rosemary are easily propagated by plant cuttings.

Harvesting

Your plant will be ready for harvesting when it blooms and when it bears sufficient leaves required for continual growth. However, the time for harvesting will depend on the herb, the part of the plant that needs to be harvested and the intended use of the herb.

As a rule of thumb, if the leaves of the herb are required, harvest them before the herb blossoms as they are of optimum quality at that time. Seeds can be collected after the plant has bloomed and the seeds mature. Typically, the color of seed heads would change from green (unripe) to brown or grey (ripe). Some herbs like Goldenseal and Chicory can be harvested for their roots in autumn once the leaves fade away. Flowers of herbs like Borage and Chamomile can be plucked just before the herb fully blossoms.

Generally early morning is considered the ideal time for harvesting the herbs. Annual herbs can be harvested till frost, while perennial herbs can be collected till late August.

Winter Protection

Perennial plants like Oregano, Rosemary and Fennel as well as biennial herbs like Caraway and Parsley are vulnerable to winter. They need to be protected from frost and strong winter winds that might affect these herbs, especially when they are shallow rooted. Applying mulch (with straw, oak leaves, boughs) 4 inches deep, after the ground has frozen in early winter, can protect the plants. It should be removed only when the plants show signs of growth in early spring.

Ensure that the soil is not excessively watered or else the plant may succumb to root rot. They may not grow well in poorly drained soils. Add organic matter to the soil which may help reduce its soginess. You may also protect your plant by planting it on raised beds.

Very sensitive plants should be brought indoors during winter months and can be transferred outdoors in spring.

Indoor Herb Gardening

You don't have to be deprived of home grown herbs if you don't have enough outdoor space to cultivate herbs. Indoor herb gardening is also the preferred method of herb growers living in regions that have harsh or extreme climatic conditions. Growing herbs indoors is not just a useful thing to do, the beautiful foliage, aroma and blossoms of herbs also add to the aesthetic appeal of your home. Herbs can grow well in pots, containers, jars and baskets indoors. Place them on your kitchen bench, balcony, porch, deck, roof-top or windowsills.

Choose small, slow growing herbs for your indoor herb garden. Some herbs that grow particularly well indoors are Basil, Chives, Chervil, Lavender, Marjoram, Rosemary, Oregano, and Thyme.

Indoor herbs need special care and nurturing as factors like drainage, sunlight and fresh air that are essential for optimum growth, are not naturally available to them.

Herbs in Containers

Herbs that require a high moisture level and are susceptible to root rot in soggy garden soils, grow best in containers. These herbs are also easy to move from one location to another without worrying about uprooting the delicate plants or by subjecting them to extreme environmental changes. Also, they can be shifted depending on the weather and required exposure to sun. Perennial plants like Rosemary need to be protected from chilly winters and need to be taken indoors during the cold months. Hence, it is practical and sensible to grow them in containers to shift them indoors conveniently.

Though clay or terracotta pots are favorable for growing herbs, containers with a drainage hole at the bottom are also preferred. Herbs grown in containers should be watered only when the upper surface of the soil dries. Remember to protect them from pests and insects such as aphids, spider mites and whiteflies.

Preserving Herbs

Preserving herbs, particularly by drying them, is a proven method to make your garden bounty last longer. For retaining highest flavor and quality, air drying is the easiest, most inexpensive method for preserving herbs. Moisture evaporates slowly and naturally during air drying, leaving behind the essential oils present in the herbs. Dehydrators are useful if you are drying large quantities of herbs or herbs such as Basil that have a high moisture content. Using a microwave oven to dry herbs is not advisable as the herbs are essentially “cooked” and hence the quality of the herbs is compromised.

Though the process is simple and easy, it requires care and precision so that the flavor and aroma of the herbs are not depleted. Harvesting at the right time is the first step towards successful preservation. Most herbs should be harvested just when they are about to bloom. At this point, the essential oil content in the buds and leaves is the highest. However, if the herb is cultivated for seeds, the right time to harvest it is after the herb has bloomed and when the seeds have acquired a brownish color.

Ideally, herbs should be harvested in the morning, after the dew drops settled on the plants have evaporated. Doing so will prevent wilting of the herbs.

Air Drying

Air drying is preferable for sturdy, low-moisture varieties of herbs such as Sage, Thyme, Summer Savory, Dill, Bay Leaves, Oregano, Rosemary and Marjoram. Basil, Tarragon, Lemon Balm and the Mints have a high moisture content and will mould if not dried quickly. Air drying is not preferred for such herbs.

Follow these simple steps to air dry herbs:

1. Use sharp scissors or pruning shears to cut the herbs to ensure minimal bruising of the plant. Gently shake each branch to remove insects. Examine each branch and remove old, damaged or diseased leaves.
2. Rinse each branch in cold water and thoroughly blot dry with towels or paper towels. Wet herbs tend to go moldy which destroys the whole bunch.
3. Turn branches upside down and remove leaves along the upper stem. The top leaves closest to the buds are more pungent and flavorful than lower leaves. You may tie five or six stems together in a small bunch. For high moisture herbs, tie two or three stems together.
4. Crush the leaves if desired, but keep in mind that whole herbs retain their flavor longer than crushed, ground or rubbed herbs.
5. Place the bunch upside down in a large brown paper bag. Gather the bag around the stems and tie. Tear or cut several holes in the bag for ventilation. Ensure plenty of room inside the bag so leaves do not touch the sides of the bag. Categorize each bag by writing the name and date on each bag.
6. Hang the bag in a warm, airy room or attic. Leave undisturbed for at least 2-4 weeks.

Drying the herbs in the sun can speed up the process but may result in loss of flavor, color and fragrance.

Oven Drying

In some cases, herbs are also heated in the oven for quicker drying. However, this method requires utmost care as the slightest negligence can lead to loss of flavor and color of the herbs. Here's how to do this:

Set the conventional oven to 180°F / 82C

Spread the herbs on a tray ensuring that they don't overlap each other. Do this in small batches.

Place the tray in the oven and keep the door slightly ajar.

Let the herbs dry in the oven for 3-4 hours.

Take the herbs out, let them cool down or come to room temperature and store in an airtight container. Do not store the herbs while they are still hot.

Silica or Salt Drying

Silica or salt drying is commonly used for drying flowers. In this process, a container is filled with silica or non-iodized table salt and the herbs are placed in layers in the container. This soaks all the moisture from the herb and lets it retain the original shape. This entire process takes two to four weeks.

Freezing

Freezing is also a commonly used method for preserving herbs like Chives, Dill, Basil and Parsley. The herbs can be blanched in boiling water for about a minute and then soaked immediately in ice water. The herbs can then be sealed in zippered bags and stored until use. An interesting way of storing herbs such as Coriander/Cilantro, Basil and Mints is to chop the herbs finely or puree them and use your regular ice cube tray to freeze the herbs in cubes. Next time you want to use these herbs, just drop a cube into your recipe and voila!

Storage

Dried herbs should be stored in clean, dry, airtight containers. Label and date each container. Herbs are susceptible to mould, therefore, they must be dried properly before being stored. The containers must be checked every few days for any sign of moisture or mould. If there is any moisture in the jar, the drying procedure should be repeated. Also, dried herbs must be kept away from light or heat to preserve their color and flavor.

Sage is the only herb that will grow stronger in flavor during storage. Make rubbed sage by placing dried leaves in a wire strainer or sieve over a plate and rub against the side. Sage is a strong herb and rubbing creates smaller pieces for more even

Store the herbs in a cool, dry and dark place, away from sunlight. Dried herbs can last indefinitely, but are best used within a year. Herbs are NOT like wine, they do not taste better with age! Most herbs will lose their flavor and aroma with every passing day, and as such you may need to use a spoonful of herbs when just a pinch would normally do.

Companion Planting

Companion planting is based on the concept that certain plants can benefit others when planted in proximity. Sometimes, just planting certain herbs next to each other in your herb garden can show phenomenal results. This method can make your herbs flourish, improve the soil quality and help in pest management. Conversely, some combinations of plants just don't work - when grown together; the growth of either one or all of the plants may be affected adversely.

Some plants release or absorb chemicals, affect the density and texture of the soil that may help or harm other plants. Growing Basil with tomatoes can intensify the flavor of tomatoes and also keep flies and mosquitoes away. However, if Basil and Rue are planted together, they decelerate each other's growth.

The table below contains a list of observations made about some common herbs:

Name of Herb	Grows Well With	Keep Away From
Angelica		Dill
Anise	Coriander/Cilantro	
Basil	Tomato	Rue
Bay Leaves	Beans and Grains	
Borage	Tomato, Squash, Strawberries	
Caraway		Dill
Catnip	Aubergine	
Chervil	Radish	

Chives	Carrots	
Coriander/Cilantro	Anise	
Dill	Cabbage	Carrots, Caraway and Angelica
Fennel		Most plants
Hyssop	Cabbage, Grapes	Radish
Lovage	Most Plants	
Mint	Cabbage, Tomatoes	
Nasturtium	Radish, Cabbage, Squash, Pumpkin, Fruit trees	
Oregano	Brassicas	
Parsley	Tomato, Asparagus	
Rosemary	Cabbage, Beans, Carrots, Sage	
Rue	Roses and Raspberries	Basil
Sage	Rosemary, Cabbage, Carrots	Cucumbers
Thyme	Cabbage	

Growing Herbs Organically

Growing organic herbs is one step closer to promoting sustainable agriculture. The amount of chemicals your herb garden feeds on in the form of pesticides and fertilizers can be shocking. After all, you end up consuming these toxins through the yield and adversely affect your health in the process. Building your own organic herb garden can be a panacea to that problem. It might seem like a huge leap to stop using the most conventional ways of gardening and to go all natural, but it pays off in the long run and is not as complicated as it sounds!

If you look at some of the benefits of organic gardening, you would be surely tempted to give it a try. Organically grown plants are also known to have better resistance against pests, diseases and weather abnormalities. When you grow herbs organically, you will notice significant improvement in yield quality, quantity and flavor of the herbs. Organic matter is also known to enrich the soil and improve its water retention level and drainage.

Here is how you can build an organic herb garden:

Clear your garden of weeds. Uproot or dig out all the weeds and wait for a few days to ensure they don't sprout again. This will help you check any weed problems in the future.

Prepare the soil. Measure the levels of various nutrients present in the soil and the amount required to grow the herbs of your choice. Consult a professional gardener to help you assess this.

Use organic fertilizers to supplement your soil. You can add compost, ground bark, leaf mold, bone meal, moss and rock phosphate in addition to the very common animal manure to enrich your soil. Use greensand to add nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium to the soil. You can adjust the soil's pH level by using lime or sulphur.

You can even consider making your own compost with vegetable waste, grass cuttings, sea weed, fish leftovers *etc.* Make a compost heap and place it on your herb garden after the ingredients have broken down. However, this process is fairly time-consuming, so you must be patient!

Add one fertilizer and two nutrients at a time and let it settle for a month in the soil before planting the herbs. If the soil in your garden is clay, you will also have to add some sand to it.

Look for organic seeds. Owing to their growing demand, they are usually available in most nurseries. You can also look for organic farms, garden centers, farmers' cooperatives, health food stores as well as horse barns and chicken producers to get organic seeds and fertilizers.

If you have already built the garden using inorganic fertilizers, you can still go organic. All you have to do is, replace the chemicals with natural organic fertilizers and nutrients.

Check your garden on a regular basis. This will help you check any diseases, weeds, pests or sprouts at an early stage.



List of Herbs

Angelica

Angelica (*Archangelica officinalis*) is a biennial herb belonging to the Apiaceae family, known for its aroma and medicinal properties. It is also known as the “herb of the angels”. The plant grows from 1 m to 2.5 m in height, has a purplish-green stem and triangular leaves. It has a fleshy taproot with small branches. The plant bears delicate white colored flowers that bloom in clusters. The fruit is pale-yellow and has oval-shaped seeds.



According to one legend, a monk had a dream in which this herb was revealed to him by an angel to cure the plague - hence the name Angelica or Archangel.

Common Names

Angelique, American Angelica, Archangel, Garden Angelica, High Angelica, Masterwort, Purple-stem Angelica, Wild Archangel, Wild Angelica

Properties

Angelica has a warming effect and properties that counter the effect of poison. It has been used as a remedy for various contagious diseases like plague and influenza, and is known to relieve wounds caused by dog bites. This herb helps in improving the blood circulation and alleviates conditions like Buerger's disease (*acute inflammation and clotting of arteries and veins of hands and feet*). Improved blood circulation, coupled with the warming effect of this herb, provides relief in bronchitis. The root of this plant is usually used for curing various respiratory problems. All parts of Angelica are known to stimulate the digestive system and alleviate indigestion, gas and colic.

Angelica's stems are known for their naturally-sweet flavor and are often used in the candied form in sweets and for decoration in pastries. The stems are also used to add flavor to pork, fish and shellfish recipes as well as in teas, soups, salads and various herb mixtures. The oil extracted from Angelica leafstalks are used as a flavoring agent in gin, vermouth and various liqueurs. Due to its aromatic qualities and ornamental appeal, the flowers are also used in floral arrangements.

Warnings

Despite various medicinal benefits, Angelica should be consumed in moderation. Angelica is known to thin blood and is not suitable for pregnant women.

Cultivation

Angelica is grown in moist, shady areas and moderate weather in Europe, Canada and United States. The seeds do not respond well to transplantation. They require slightly acidic soil, with a pH level ranging between 4.5 and 7. Ideally, the seeds should be fresh to allow germination and should be refrigerated for 4 to 5 weeks before sowing. Spring is the ideal time to plant Angelica.

Angelica plant is susceptible to dangers like crown rot, aphids, leaf miners and spider mites.

Anise

Anise (*Pimpinella anisum*) is an aromatic herb from the Mediterranean region and Southwest Asia. It is mainly grown in Europe, Southwest Asia, India, and parts of South America. Anise belongs to the Apiaceae family and is a flowering plant. Anise plant grows up to 1-3 ft in height and bears white to yellowish-white flowers. The fruit is 3mm-long when ripe, oval shaped and grey-green in color.



Pastis, Absinthe, Spanish Anesone, Italian Sambuca, Greek Ouzo, Turkish raki or Lebanese arak: Anise based liqueurs are very popular in most of the Mediterranean countries and every region has it's own version of the Anise liqueur

Common Name

Anise, Aniseed

Properties

Though the entire plant exudes ‘anisey’ aroma, only the fruit is used for consumption and medicinal benefits. Anise has an assortment of healing properties. It helps in relieving gas and other digestion-related disorders. Additionally, it helps in curing anemia by improving digestion, which promotes absorption of iron. Anise aids laxation of mucous and works as an expectorant. These qualities help in curing cough, asthma and bronchitis. It also has antibacterial and antiseptic properties and is known to soothe pain and relax muscles. Nursing women can benefit from this herb as its seeds help in increasing the production of breast milk. The seeds are used in various herbal medicines used to cure impotence and frigidity. Anise tea can be helpful in alleviating morning sickness. Topical application of Anise oil is also known to help in curing lice and scabies.

Apart from the medicinal benefits, Anise is also used to add flavor to alcoholic drinks and various foods like breads, desserts, cakes, candies, curries, *etc.* Aniseed oil is also used to add fragrance to perfumes and soaps.

Warnings

Anise is largely considered as a safe herb. However, it can have side-effects on people allergic to anethole, which is the chief component of this herb. Excessive use of Anise oil is known to cause nausea, vomiting and seizures, especially in the case of infants. Concentrated Anise oil can also cause irritation on sensitive skin.

Cultivation

Anise is an annual herb and needs at least 120 frost-free days to mature. The seeds are sown in early summer in dry, light soil. Anise can also be planted as seedlings. The distance between two plants should ideally be 4 inches.

Basil

Basil (*Ocimum Basilicum*) is a fragrant herb belonging to the Lamiaceae family and native to India, Asia and Africa but is now grown and consumed all over the world. Basil plant normally grows up to 1-2 feet in height and has round leaves which sometimes have ruffled or pointed edges. The leaves are typically green in color, although some varieties have a speck of red or purple. Basil plant is strikingly similar to the peppermint plant, which is not surprising as they belong to the same family. There are over 60 varieties of Basil, all of which differ somewhat in appearance and taste.



One of the varieties of Basil, Holy Basil (*Ocimum tenuiflorum*) is sacred in the Hindu religion. The goddess, Tulsi is thought to have manifested into the plant. Holy Basil, also known as Tulsi is a Hindu symbol of love, eternal life, purification and

Common Names (Varieties)

Common Basil, Garden Basil, Sweet Basil, African Blue Basil, Anise Basil, French Basil, Holy Basil (*Tulsi*), Thai Basil, Genovese Basil, Lemon Basil, Cinnamon Basil, Spicy Globe Basil, Purple Ruffles Basil, Red Rubin Basil

Properties

Basil is known for its antibacterial properties. Essential oil present in its leaves has demonstrated the ability to inhibit several species of pathogenic bacteria that have become resistant to commonly used antibiotic drugs. Basil leaves can be rubbed on insect bites to prevent itchiness and rashes. It is considered as an anti-inflammatory food source and can provide relief for individuals with inflammatory health problems like rheumatoid arthritis or inflammatory bowel conditions. Tea made by infusing Basil leaves can help in relieving digestive disorders. It is a good source of Vitamin A, iron, calcium and magnesium, all of which promotes cardiovascular health.

Basil leaves also offer a unique benefit – essential oil derived from these leaves can be used as an insect repellent. It can also be used in massage oil to aid in depression or anxiety.

The highly fragrant Basil leaves are liberally used to season a variety of dishes. This herb is largely used in Italian, Thai, Vietnamese and Laotian cuisine. Fresh Basil leaves add a delicate flavor and aroma to sauces, gravies, sandwiches and salads.

Warnings

Basil is a relatively safe herb and there are no known allergies or side effects associated with it. However, pregnant or breastfeeding women should avoid using essential oil derived from Basil leaves.

Cultivation

Basil is a non-fussy herb and will grow under most climatic conditions. However, it needs soil that is well-drained yet retains enough moisture so that the plant does not wilt. It needs adequate sunshine – about 6 to 8 hours every day, and can be grown indoors as well as outdoors. Direct exposure to sunlight and adequate water supply are essential for the plant to flourish.

Preventive steps should be taken to protect the plant from seed and soil borne diseases like Fusarium wilt. It may also get affected in chilly weather. Common pests like aphids, flea beetles and Japanese beetles may also destroy the plant.

Bay Laurel (Bay Leaves)

Bay Laurel (*Laurus nobilis*) is an evergreen tree or a large shrub belonging to the Lauraceae family, historically renowned for its beauty and aromatic leaves. It is native to the Mediterranean region and Asia Minor. The leaves are olive-green, about 6–12 cm long and 2–4 cm broad, with a characteristic finely serrated and wrinkled edge. The flowers are small and yellow in color and bloom in clusters around May.



Common Names

According to traditional Greek folklore, the beautiful mythological nymph Daphne transformed into a laurel in order to preserve her virtue and virginity, which made the tree a longstanding symbol of all

Bay Laurel, Bay Leaf, Bay Tree, Daphne, Grecian Laurel, Laurel, Laurier d'Apollon, Lorbeer, Laurier Sauce, Noble Laurel, Roman Laurel, Sweet Bay, True Laurel, Wreath Laurel

Properties

Bay Laurel or Bay leaves have been traditionally used for treating high blood sugar, migraine headaches, bacterial and fungal infections, and gastric ulcers. The leaves and berries are believed to have several medicinal properties including astringent, carminative, diaphoretic, digestive, diuretic, emetic and stomachic properties. Essential oil derived from Bay Laurel (Oil of Bays or Oleum Lauri) can be applied topically for the treatment of arthritic pain, muscle sprains, bruises and swelling in the tendons. Bay Leaf has also been used to treat rheumatism, amenorrhea, and colic.

Bay leaves are intensely aromatic with notes of wood, eucalyptus and clove. They impart a unique aroma and flavor to marinades, sauces, soups and stews. They are used extensively in Mediterranean, European and North American cuisine.

Warnings

Bay leaves are very bitter and should be removed before serving a recipe that uses these leaves. Not only are they tough to chew, but they are also easy to choke on if swallowed inadvertently.

Cultivation

Bay Laurel makes a great addition to the kitchen garden and can be easily grown on a patio or deck. It essentially needs adequate sunlight and protection from easterly winds and frost. The soil or the compost used must contain lime. The plant does not require much watering. It can be propagated during late summer, with the help of shoots. In places where the temperature falls below 25 degrees centigrade, Bay Laurel should be planted indoors in large containers. This way the plant can be moved indoors during winters.

It is vulnerable to aphids, powdery mildews, mealy bugs, psyllids, insects, thrips *etc.*

Bergamot

Bergamot (*Monarda didyma*) also known as 'Oswego tea' is indigenous to Eastern North America and is a member of the Lamiaceae family. This highly fragrant plant grows 2-3 feet high. Flowers vary in color from pink to reddish and are in large curlicues on top of the stem. Dark colored leaves are rough surfaced and contain citrus flavor. Leaves and flowers form the consumable parts of the herb.



Bergamot or Oswego tea replaced the English Tea after the Boston Tea party when the English Tea was renounced while protesting against high taxes.

Common Names

American Bee Balm, American Melissa, Fragrant Balm, Gold Melissa, Horse Mint, Indian Nettle, Indian Plume, Red Balm, Red Bergamot, Scarlet Bergamot, Scarlet Monarda

Properties

Bergamot is considered to be an expectorant, tonic, deodorant and antispasmodic. Additional properties include anti-anxiety, antiseptic, carminative, digestive, insecticide and analgesic. These properties help in ailments like nausea, vomiting, cough, flu, stomach upsets and sinus. Bergamot primarily acts as a stimulant and helps with digestion. Consuming Bergamot tea is known to provide relief in cold, throat and digestion problems. It can also help in chest problems, insomnia and flatulence. Bergamot oil is useful in aromatherapy and aids in treatment of anxiety, nervous tension and helps with the urinary tract and respiratory system. Topical application of the oil is considered to be good for skin problems like eczema, acne and psoriasis. It is useful in wounds and swollen veins.

Bergamot leaves and flowers are widely used for its fruity flavor and aroma. They can also be used in fruit drinks and salads to add flavor as well as for garnishing. It particularly enhances pork recipes. Leaves are used for making refreshing herbal tea as well as a facial steam. Fresh as well as dried leaves and petals can be added to bathing water to have a refreshing and perfumed bath.

Warnings

It is necessary to restrict the intake of bergamot infusion to specific doses and it is advisable to consult your doctor in the case of any existing health problems. It is known to stimulate menstruation therefore pregnant women and those experiencing menstrual disorders should avoid it.

Cultivation

Often regarded as a garden plant, it can propagate from creeping roots and slips or cuttings. Well-drained moist and highly organic soil is preferable. The soil should be slightly acidic and must be kept well-watered during hot weather. It can bear full sun but exposure to morning sunlight is favorable for optimal growth. It is considered to be a good container plant. Seeds should be sown 8 weeks before the last spring frost date. Morning time is ideal to pluck the leaves for fresh use.

Though known to be a pest-free herb, it is sometimes susceptible to aphids and powdery mildew which can be prevented with the help of good air circulation.

Borage

Borage (*Borago officinalis*) is an annual herb that is known to have originated in Syria and belongs to the Boraginaceae family. It grows throughout Europe, the Mediterranean region, North Africa, Iran and is also cultivated in some areas of North America. Borage plant grows 2 to 3 feet in height and blooms small, blue, pink or purple-colored flowers. These beautiful flowers have five narrow triangular star-shaped petals and hence its name “Starflower”. The leaves and stems of the plant are covered with small bristle-like hairs. It produces plenty of seeds and thus continues to grow and spread prolifically.



Common Names

An ancient Roman verse, spoken to this day, goes: "I, Borage, always bring courage."

Beebread, Bernagie, Borage, Borraja, Bourrache, Bugloss, Burrage, Common Borage, Fleurs De Bourrache, Hodan, Ruri-Zisa, Starflower

Properties

This herb has a high mucilage content that makes it helpful in relieving most respiratory disorders. Owing to the skin smoothening properties of Borage, it can be used as a salve to cure skin inflammations, rashes and sores. Borage is said to stimulate the production of adrenaline, helping the body cope with stress and fatigue. It also makes an excellent detox agent and is used in several herbal remedies to cure gastrointestinal disorders such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

Borage leaves and seed oil can be used to alleviate premenstrual cramps, mood swings and depression due to hormonal fluctuations in women. An infusion of Borage promotes the production of milk in breastfeeding mothers. Its tea also helps to reduce fever, relieves chest congestion and encourages a speedy recovery after an illness.

Fresh Borage leaves taste like cucumbers and adds texture and flavor to soups and salads. The attractive Borage flowers are edible and taste mildly sweet, like honey. They are used to decorate desserts such as cakes and pastries and are also frozen in ice cubes to add an extra zing to cocktails and coolers.

Warnings

Borage leaves contain traces of liver-toxic pyrrolizidine alkaloids, and is a restricted variety in some countries including Australia and New Zealand. Consuming Borage in large quantities may cause liver damage and cancer. However, due to its therapeutic properties, using the herb in moderation is considered perfectly harmless.

Cultivation

Borage is considered a wild, easy to grow herb and can tolerate most types of soil. Ideal growing conditions are dry soil, sunny climate and rich soil with a pH level of 6 to 7. Borage seeds should be planted around ¼ inch deep as they need air to germinate successfully. The plant needs to be protected from a variety of pests and insects like lady butterfly, woolly bear, caterpillars and tarnished plant bug. It is also vulnerable to infections such as crown rot.

Caper

Caper (*Capparis spinosa*) is a biennial, evergreen, shrub belonging to the Capparaceae family, native to the Mediterranean region. The plant usually grows wild in rocky coastal areas and has oval-shaped, fleshy leaves. The plant bears small buds, closed tight as fists, that spring daily from the long shoots and eventually open into exquisite white, pale pink or pink flowers with violet pistils and stamens. The buds are the size of a maize kernel and olive green in color when ripe.



Common Names

Capers are categorized on the basis of their size: the smaller the size, the more desirable and expensive the fruit.

Caper, Cappero, Capperone, Caper Bush, Capparis Spinosa, Kabar, Kapers, Kapersy, Kebre

Properties

Caper is believed to have aphrodisiac, astringent, carminative, emmenagogue and diuretic properties. The leaves, stems and fruits of this plant are used for treating sterility, to increase sexual desires, to heal open wounds and to treat mouth infections. Herbal tea made from Caper root and young shoots is said to be beneficial in treating rheumatism. Caper roots also help in increasing blood pressure by contracting the blood vessels. Topical application of Caper roots is known to help sensitive skin and bruises. Caper bark is dried to be used as a diuretic.

The buds of this bush are also known to have laxative, expectorant and tonic properties. They are used to treat coughs, eye infections and known to prevent cataract formation. Caper decoction is also used to cure fungal infection in the vaginal area. Topical application of bruised leaves is believed to cure gout.

Caper buds are used extensively as a condiment or garnish in Mediterranean, Greek and Italian cuisine. They are typically pickled in oil, brine or vinegar and excess salt is drained off before using them for cooking. They go particularly well in tomato and wine based sauces and in poultry and fish recipes. Capers can also be used to substitute olives for garnishing a Martini.

Warnings

Consulting a health care professional may be advisable to avoid any possible adverse effects of Capers. Pregnant women and others taking any medical treatment should use it cautiously.

Cultivation

It can propagate from seeds as well as cuttings. It is an easy-to-grow shrub which can grow well in sandy, loamy or even heavy (clay) soils. It prefers well-drained soil rich in acids and alkaline. Adequate sunlight and watering are required for the shrub to grow at its best. Generally it takes 3-4 years to mature completely. Ensure that regular pruning is carried out to achieve higher production.

Catnip

Catnip (*Nepeta cataria*) is an aromatic, perennial herb that belongs to the Lamiaceae family. It is native to Europe and Asia and is cultivated in North America. Catnip plants grow from 3 to 5 ft in height and have fuzzy, greyish-green leaves and small, white flowers that bloom in the summer. The herb is popular for its fragrance and the stimulating effect it has on all members of the feline (cat) family.



Sew catnip in your kitty's toys to keep them busy for hours at a stretch. Interestingly, when sniffed, catnip will stimulate your cat, but when eaten it will act as a sedative. Catnip is not harmful for your pet feline, so your kitty-cat will not

Common Names

Cataria, Catmint, Catnep, Catnip, Catrup, Cat's Heal All, Cat's-play, Cat's Wort, Catswort, Catwort, Chi Hsueh Tsao, Field Balm, Garden Nep, Herba Cataria, Herba Catti, Nebada, Nep

Properties:

Catnip has astringent properties and has a settling effect on the stomach. It has carminative qualities and thus acts as a remedy for colic, flatulence and headaches due to digestive problems. It is also considered a diaphoretic and therefore its infusion helps in alleviating high body temperature caused by fever. Catnip tincture acts as an effective ointment for curing rheumatic condition, arthritis and hemorrhoids. It has also been used to cure bronchitis, asthma and

eruptive diseases like measles. The herb is also known to relieve cough, muscular pain and have a sedating effect when consumed. It is known to stimulate menstruation and also works as a tonic. An infusion made from Catnip can also help in curing bruises and dark-circles. Catnip has a pleasant and appealing taste, which makes it an easy option for treatment of children's ailments.

Catnip also tends to have a sedative effect on human beings and is often consumed in the form of herbal tea, especially to help with sleeplessness and fatigue. It is also used as a culinary herb and is frequently added in salads.

Warnings

Catnip is known to stimulate uterine contractions and induce menstruation. These qualities make it inadvisable for pregnant women and women who suffer from menstrual disorders.

Cultivation

Catnip is a non-fussy herb. It grows best in well-drained, averagely rich soil and partial shade. However, it can tolerate dry, sandy soil and full sun. The pH level of the soil can vary from 4.9 - 7.5 and it should be topped with compost. Catnip can be propagated through seeds, stem cuttings or by dividing the roots. The seeds should be sown indoors, six to eight weeks before the last frost date. Catnip can be grown indoors in pots, but it requires at least 5 hours of sunlight per day.

The plant self sows and needs proper weeding to avoid getting bushy. Catnip is usually pest free, but needs protection from root rot and rust. It also needs to be protected from cats, as they are attracted to its smell and can damage the plant.

Chamomile

Chamomile (*Matricaria chamomile*) is an annual herb belonging to the Compositae family and is native to Europe. However, now it grows wild across the world. Its hollow, erect, branching stem grows 20 inches tall. The plant bears light green feather-like leaves and daisy-like flowers and smells like pineapple or apple.



Common Names

According to ancient Egyptian folklore, Chamomile was dedicated to Ra - their sun god and was valued over all other herbs for its healing

Camomile, German Chamomile, Hungarian Chamomile, Mayweed, Pineapple Weed, Scented Mayweed, Sweet Chamomile, Wild Chamomile

Properties

Chamomile herb and flowers are said to have several medicinal uses including tonic, stomachic, anodyne, antispasmodic, laxative, diaphoretic, analgesic, carminative, anti-inflammatory and sedative properties. Chamomile flower tea is a popular herbal tea and is good for treating insomnia and other such nervous conditions. Because of the anti-inflammatory properties of the herb it is considered good for rheumatism, arthritis, and other painful swellings. It is also an antispasmodic for intestinal and menstrual cramps, relieving gas pains and acts as a very mild but efficient laxative and loosens tight muscles.

The herb is also used extensively in manufacturing lotions, massage oils and other beauty products as it can help reduce eczema itching and other skin inflammation. Chamomile preparations are mild enough for using on sensitive young skin of infants suffering from skin conditions. Chamomile mouthwash can be used for soothing mouth sores and gum disease.

Chamomile flower infusion can be applied externally as a wash or compress for skin inflammations, sunburn, burns, and added to the bath for relaxing tired, achy muscles and feet and softening the skin. The flowers are made into a salve for treating hemorrhoids and wounds. The dried flowers are used in potpourri, scented candles, incense sticks, linen pouches, herb pillows, and are also used as insect repellents.

Apart from its extensive use for making a delightful and beneficial herbal tea, Chamomile flowers are also used in salads.

Warnings

Chamomile may affect the rate of breakdown of a wide range of prescription medications. It may interact with anticoagulant medications (medicines that prevent blood clotting). Because of its sedative properties it should be used with caution by people taking sedative medications such as benzodiazepines and alcohol. Chamomile tea contains tannins, which may reduce the absorption of iron supplements if taken together.

Cultivation

This herb is relatively easy-to grow and tolerates most kinds of soil. Adequate sunlight is preferred and spring is the ideal time for plantation. Seeds should be sown 24-36 inches apart. It can tolerate a pH range of 6.1 to 7.5 and expects sufficient regular watering. The plant is known to self-seed and spread prolifically. Hence, it is not advisable to grow it in containers.

Chervil

Chervil (*Anthriscus cerefolium*), a biennial herb, is indigenous to southern Russia, Caucasus and the Middle East and stems from the Apiaceae family. The normal height of this annual plant is 12-18 inches; in some cases it may grow up to 24-30 inches. The light green colored leaves contain an elusive aroma and peppery flavor. The stems are thin, upright and not deeply rooted in the soil. It gives little silvery white flowers in the form of clusters.



Chervil was once referred to as 'myrrhis' because the fragrance of the volatile oil extracted from its leaves bears a striking resemblance to the biblical resinous substance

Common Names

Chervil, Beaked Parsley, French Parsley, Garden Chervil, Gourmet Parsley, Salad Chervil

Properties

Flowers, roots and leaves can be consumed for both culinary as well as medicinal benefits. Chervil is considered as an effective expectorant and general stimulant. It is known to cure eczema, alleviate stomach problems and keeps blood pressure in check. Besides this, Chervil infusion also serves as a good skin freshener. It is said that Chervil tea consumption helps in reducing blood pressure as well as serves as a cool soothing eyewash. The plant is also known to reduce digestion problems.

Besides medicinal use, Chervil leaves are used in salads, soups, stews, seafood, egg dishes and certain sauces to add aroma and flavor. Fresh leaves and flowers are also used for garnishing and stuffing. Its roots can be cooked as vegetables. Chervil is extensively used in French Cuisine.

Warnings

Chervil is generally recognized as safe for human consumption and has no known side effects.

Cultivation

This herb can be easily cultivated outdoors as well as indoors using pots, containers, boxes *etc.* It requires a cool and moist atmosphere with a shady site. Spring or autumn seasons are favorable for cultivation. Seeds should be sown 2 weeks before the last spring frost date. It is advisable to use fresh seeds as they are effective only for a limited period. It is necessary to keep soil moist. It is known that seedlings take around 7-14 days to emerge. Ideally, keep a distance of 10 inches between two plants.

Chervil is known to be susceptible to carrot weevils and aphids.

Chicory

Chicory (*Cichorium intybus L.*) is a bushy, perennial herb native to Europe and belongs to the Asteraceae family. It is also cultivated in North America and West Asia. It can grow wild and is also cultivated for its roots, flowers and leaves. The herb attains a height of three to five feet and has beautiful blue or lavender flowers. The plant has a taproot, similar to that of a dandelion. The leaves towards the base of the plant are hairy, like that of a dandelion. Due to these similarities, Chicory is often called Blue Dandelion.



Common Names

New Orleanians enjoy their Beignets (fried, raised pieces of yeast dough, sprinkled with sugar or coated with various icings) with café au lait made traditionally using strong dark roast coffee and chicory, served with an equal part of hot milk.

Blue-sailors, Blue Dandelion, Chicory, Coffeeweed, Endive, Garden Chicory, Succory, Wild Chicory, Wild Succory

Properties

Chicory root has several medicinal benefits. It acts as a stimulant, ensuring smooth functioning of the stomach, liver and gall bladder. Chicory is also known as a mild, non-irritating diuretic and laxative, particularly helpful in the treatment of chronic constipation. It is also considered as an effective blood tonic, useful in treating anemia. Chicory flowers, seeds and roots are used for the treatment of various liver and gall bladder defects. It promotes the secretion of bile and empties the gall bladder.

Because of its astringent properties, applying a poultice of fresh Chicory leaves on skin afflicted with imperfections such as pimples or blemishes can provide relief. This poultice is also used as a remedy for other skin lacerations, inflammations and swelling.

Chicory roots are baked, ground and used as a coffee substitute or additive. Ground Chicory is mixed with coffee to counter the acidic effect of an excess of caffeine on the liver. It has a sedating effect on the nervous system that balances the stimulating effect of coffee. The young leaves of the Chicory plant are blanched and added to salads and are also used in some Roman recipes. In some places in Europe, tender, young Chicory roots are served steamed or boiled, seasoned with butter and other herbs.

Warnings

Chicory is considered a relatively safe herb as it is widely used all across the world, without any significant incidence of adverse effects. However, Chicory root is rich in oxalates and should be avoided by people who have the tendency to produce kidney stones.

Cultivation

Chicory, like most wild herbs, is easy to grow and is not fussy about the soil type. However, if Chicory is cultivated for its root, it should be sown in a deep bed. The seeds should ideally be sown in drills during late spring. The drills should be 15 inches apart from each other. With the combination of the right time, deep bed and friable soil, the roots can be easily gathered in the fall of the plant's first year. Cultivators must note that Chicory has a tendency to spread; therefore, it must be planted in areas disjoined from the rest of the garden or farm.

Chicory needs to be protected from grazing stock. It is also susceptible to *Sclerotinia sclerotiorum* (white rot, watery soft rot) in cold.

Chives

Chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*) are the smallest and the most delicately flavored species of the Alliaceae (onion) family. They are native to Asia, North America and Eastern Europe but are commonly grown all over Europe. Chive plants grow in clumps and their round, hollow grass-like leaves grow eight to twenty inches in height. The plant has round, pink or purple-colored flowers that bloom in the months of June and July.



Colonists in America believed that hanging bunches of chives throughout the house can drive away disease and evil influences.

Common Names

Chives, Cives, Civette

Properties

Chives have medicinal benefits similar to those of onion and garlic and are rich in vitamin A and C. Chives are known to help with improving indigestion and reducing blood pressure. Essential oil derived from Chives is known to have antibacterial properties.

Chives are known for their subtle oniony flavor that makes them a popular addition in various cuisines. Typically, fresh chives are finely chopped and used in salads, sandwiches, and other such savory dishes. They go very well with potatoes, sour cream, cheese and egg recipes such as omelettes and scrambled eggs.

Warnings

Chives contain sulphur compounds which give them their characteristic oniony flavor. Handling of Chives may cause allergic contact dermatitis and urticaria (hives).

Cultivation

The easiest and quickest way to grow Chives in your garden is to pull out a clump from an existing patch and plant it wherever you want to grow them. They can also be planted from seeds. Plant them directly in the garden in early spring or as late as 2 months before the first fall frost. They require rich and moist soil with a pH level ranging from 6 to 8. Ideally, Chives need full sun to flourish but can also sustain reasonably well in partial shade.

The garlicky and oniony odor of the plant prevents pests and insects from damaging the plant. In rare cases rust or downy mildew may be seen.

Coriander / Cilantro

Coriander (*Coriandrum sativum*), also known as Cilantro, is an annual herb considered native to Southern Europe and the Middle East but is also indigenous to South-Western Asia. The bright green plant, belonging to the Apiaceae family, has delicate stems and a thin taproot. It grows up to 16 to 24 in. (40 - 60 cm). The compound lower leaves are round in appearance and lobed, while the upper leaves are finely divided into very narrow, lacy segments. The plant bears small white or pink flowers and the fruits are nearly globular and consist of two, single-seeded mericarp. Coriander seeds have a mild burning taste and a spicy aroma. Fully ripe and dried Coriander seeds smell and taste completely different from the leaves.



Coriander is mentioned in the Bible where manna is described as being "like a Coriander Seed, white" (Exodus 16:31).

Common names

Cilantro, Coriander, Chinese Parsley, Dhaniya, Hu Sui, Mexican Parsley

Properties

Coriander is considered as an appetite stimulant and promotes the secretion of gastric juices, thereby aiding digestion. It also acts as a carminative and is said to improve most troubles of the gastrointestinal tract including indigestion, flatulence and diarrhea. A poultice of coriander seeds, when applied to affected areas can relieve painful joints and rheumatism. Essential oil derived from coriander seeds possesses antibacterial and antifungal properties and can be used as a fungicide. One pharmaceutical use of coriander is in masking the tastes of foul medicines, especially purgatives, or to calm the irritating effects on the stomach caused by some medicines.

All parts of the Coriander plant are edible and are used extensively in Middle Eastern, Indian, South East Asian, Mexican, and Central American cuisines. It is a highly fragrant herb and is added to various salads, soups, sauces, chutneys, curries, stir fried vegetables, and other savory recipes to add flavor and aroma. Fresh Coriander is usually chopped and added to dishes just before serving to preserve its flavor and properties.

Coriander seeds (whole as well as powdered) are an important ingredient in curry powder and in various recipes of the Indian subcontinent. Coriander roots are used in Thai cooking to flavor soups and chicken recipes.

Warnings

Coriander is largely considered safe to use and has no known side effects. Some people are, however, put off by the pungent aroma and the distinct flavor imparted by coriander leaves in various recipes.

Cultivation

Coriander is an easy herb to grow, preferring a well-drained, fertile soil. The soil should not be over-fertilized as a high level of nitrogen can delay ripening and destroy the flavor of the plant. The pH level of the soil should be from 4.9 to 8.2. Coriander plant can tolerate spells of cold and heat but need adequate sunlight, proper watering in dry periods and weeding. The delicate herb needs to be protected from harsh winds. Coriander plant does not respond well to transplantation. Coriander can also be grown indoors in a pot.

It is vulnerable to fungal infections and the roots succumb to decay if the soil is poorly drained and has a high nitrogen content.

Cress

Cress (*Lepidium sativum*) also known as Garden Cress comes from the Brassicaceae (mustard) family and is indigenous to Europe and Asia. It is an annual herb which is also considered as a salad plant and can grow up to 2 feet tall. It bears refreshing, pungent frilled leaves with a peppery flavor. The beautiful orange flowers are often used for creative decorative purpose. Fruits of the plant are similar to caper berries.



Common Names

Cress is cultivated in abundance by the Ethiopians for the edible oils contained in the seeds.

Curly Cress, Garden Pepper Cress, Passerage, Pepper Grass, Pepperweed, Pepperwort, Town Cress

Properties

Cress has numerous healing properties. Nutritional elements like Vitamin A and C, iron, calcium, and folic acid present in its leaves impart significant medicinal value to the herb. It is believed that they serve as an effective treatment for healthy hair and skin as well as other health benefits. Leaves are also known to help as detoxification agents.

Garden Cress is extensively used in green salads to add zing to its taste and appearance. Its culinary use includes garnishing as well as cooking as a green leafy vegetable. They are also used in sandwiches instead of lettuce to add a peppery zing to boring sandwiches. Young and fresh Cress leaves can also add taste to various soups.

Warnings

Avoid self prescribing the herb. Seek advice of your health care professional before consuming it for medicinal purposes. Pregnant women should consume it cautiously.

Cultivation

Cress is an easy herb to grow indoors as well as outdoors. It is not fussy about the soil, weather and maintenance; however, it grows best in damp soil and partial shade. It is also suitable for aquaculture cultivation. Early spring or early autumn are the ideal time to plant the seeds. Considered to be a quick crop, it takes about 7-12 days to mature and harvesting can be carried out then. To obtain regular continual supply of the leaves ensure that you sow seeds successively.

This plant needs to be protected from extremely cold weather especially when the temperature falls below -5 C.

Curry Leaves

Curry Leaves (*Murraya koenigii*) are native to South West Asia and belongs to the Rutaceae family. It is used extensively in India, Malaysia, Fiji, and Srilanka for various culinary and medicinal purposes. The leaves are small, pointed and in clusters, giving out a strong aroma strongly reminiscent of citrus and anise. The tree can grow 2 to 5 meters in height and bears white fragrant flowers and purple or green berries.



If you attempt to buy a curry plant in a Western plant nursery, you will probably end up with the herb which goes by the name of 'curry plant' (*Helichrysum italicum*) a half-hardy evergreen native to Southern Europe which is not even remotely related to

Common Names

Curry Leaf, Feuilles de Cari, Fogli di Cari, Meetha Neem, Pindosin

Properties

Curry Leaves are used extensively in traditional Indian alternative healing therapies such as Ayurveda. They are used to cure piles, lower the body temperature, and are beneficial in treating leukemia and blood disorders. Infusion made of Curry Leaves with hot water and a little honey is said to prevent conditions such as nausea, constipation, and other stomach disorders. They are used to alleviate morning sickness as well as motion sickness. It is also used to relieve skin irritations and treat wounds caused by poisonous bites.

Curry Leaves are considered indispensable in South East Asian cuisine. They are best used fresh in various curries, vegetables, pickles, chutneys *etc.* and add an aromatic pungent flavor. They add a unique twist to several vegetarian delicacies as well as meat and fish dishes. Dried Curry Leaves have very little flavor and have hardly any culinary use.

Warnings

Seeds and some other parts of the plant are poisonous and should not be consumed. Skin irritation and other such allergic reactions may be some of the possible side effects of the herb.

Cultivation

Curry Leaves make beautiful and useful houseplants preferring rich, moist well-drained soil and will tolerate semi shade. The easiest way to cultivate a Curry Leaf tree is the cutting method along with transplanting suckers which grow readily from mature plants. Curry Leaves freeze very well, but do not remove the leaves from its stalks when storing them.

Ensure that the curry leaf tree is protected from spider mites.

Dandelion

Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*) is a perennial herb with about 100 species. Originating in Europe and Asia, the plant belongs to the Asteraceae or sunflower family and is closely related to Chicory. It can grow up to 12 inches in height. The plant has long rosette-shaped, toothed leaves that may be dark or light green in color. A bright yellow flower grows on each purplish stalk which is smooth, leafless and hollow. The flower matures into the familiar, white, globular seed head overnight. Each seed has a tiny parachute, to spread far and wide in the wind.



Common Names

The name Dandelion is believed to be derived from "Dents Lioness", Medieval Latin, or "Dent de Lion", French, both meaning lion's tooth.

Blow Ball, Cankerwort, Lion's Tooth, Pissabed, Priest's-crown, Puff Ball, Pu Gong Ying, Pu-kung-ying, Swine Snout, Telltime, White Endive, Wild Endive **Properties**

Dandelion leaves and roots are known to help in treating hypertension and weak hearts. The roots act as detoxification agents that help in improving the functioning of the liver and gall bladder. It helps kidneys function better by eradicating the toxins from the body. The roots are also considered to treat diseases like psoriasis, arthritis and gout.

The flowers contain vitamin A; vitamin B2 and helenin which help cure night-blindness. Dandelion is also used as a remedy against skin problems like eczema and acne. Fungal infection and ulcers in the urinary passage can also be treated with Dandelion. The laxative nature of the plant aids in stomach disorders such as constipation. The plant is also believed to enable circulation in the body and strengthens body vessels. Its diuretic properties help in relieving premenstrual symptoms such as bloating and weight gain due to water retention.

Topical application of Dandelion juice is said to remove warts and to enable faster healing of wounds.

Dandelion greens are wonderful in salads, they are best consumed steamed or sautéed. Dandelion flowers are also considered a delicacy. They may be dipped in batter and deep fried, sautéed and added in stir-fries, or pickled with vinegar and spices. Dried, roasted and ground Dandelion roots are used to make coffee.

Warnings

Some individuals might get skin rashes as a side effect of handling Dandelion herbs. It may lead to excessive production of stomach acids, so ulcer patients should cautiously consume it. Because of the intense diuretic nature the consumption of Dandelion should be subject to doctor's advice.

Cultivation

It is widely cultivated in Germany and France but grows across the world. Dandelion is known to grow easily in fields, lawns, waste ground, sand, rocks *etc.* It tolerates most kinds of soil and is considered to be a garden plant in many countries. Spring season is suitable for plantation. Harvesting can be carried out in autumn. It can tolerate soils with a pH range of 4.8 to 7.5. Seeds should be sown at a depth of a maximum 1 inch in the soil so as to germinate in good order.

Dandelion may be vulnerable to some common pests and insect infestations.

Dill

Dill (*Anethum graveolens*) has its origin in the Mediterranean region and southern Russia. This herb belonging to the Apiaceae family is also extensively grown in England, Germany and North America. It is aromatic and normally grows around 2 feet in height. Dill leaves are wispy and fernlike and have a pleasing, sweet taste. Like Fennel, it has many yellow flowers in umbels and feather-like leaves attached to the upright stalks. Dried Dill seeds are light brown in color and oval in shape, are similar in taste to Caraway, with a fragrant, sweet and citrusy flavor with a bitter undertone.



A bunch of Dill hung on the door
protects you from witches —
according to a traditional folklore

Common Names

American Dill, Common Dill, Danish Dill, Dillseed, Dilly, Dillweed, European Dill, Garden Dill

Properties

Though Dill is renowned for its culinary uses; its leaves, seeds and oils also provide medicinal benefits. Oil of Dill (extracted from the leaves, stems and seeds of the plant) has been traditionally used to make Dill water which is an effective remedy to treat colic, gas and other stomach as well as digestion problems in infants. It also alleviates intestinal spasms and cramps. Dill seeds, when chewed, can eliminate bad breath. The plant also aids in cough, cold flu, cramps and flatulence. Nursing mothers who consume it regularly can have increased breast milk production and can pass on the nutritive benefits of dill to their breastfeeding children to help prevent colic.

Dill is also considered antibacterial and helps protect against free radicals and carcinogens.

Dill leaves and seeds are widely used as seasoning in a number of dishes. Dill seeds in particular are used extensively in Scandinavian and German cuisine. Young Dill leaves go very well with fish, particularly salmon and trout. Dill is also used for flavoring sauces and baked goods.

Warnings

Immediate exposure to sunlight after the consumption of Dill may lead to develop skin rashes (photodermatitis) in some individuals.

Cultivation

Dill can grow in open areas as well as indoors in containers or pots. Well-drained fertile soil is best for cultivation. Sunlight and adequate regular watering during dry periods is required. Spring season is favorable for the plantation as Dill needs a cool temperature. To avoid stalks being affected by strong winds they should be planted in a secure area. Seeds should be sown $\frac{1}{4}$ inch deep in the soil and about 6 inches in distance between 2 plants is necessary. If cultivated indoors, it will require 5 hours of direct sunlight daily. Seeds germinate within 2 weeks. Harvesting of leaves can be carried out during summer before the plant blossoms. Seeds should be picked only when completely ripe and brown in color.

Though it is considered to be a pest-free and disease-free plant, it may be susceptible to mildew. This can be prevented by avoiding overhead sprinkling when plants reach 2 feet high.

Elderflower

Elderflower (*Sambucus nigra*), also known as Elder, is a dense plant known to have originated in Europe belonging to the Caprifoliaceae family. It is largely grown in many European countries. The height of the plant may reach up to 10 meters. Its aromatic star-shaped flowers are white in color and grouped in bunches. The plant produces berry-like fruits which may be stark blue, amber, red or black in color.



According to one age-old belief, Elder trees prevent and protect from witches and evil influence. It was also said that green Elder branches, if buried in the graves, would protect the dead from witches.

Common Names

Bourtrees, Elderberry, Elderflower, European Elder, Pipe Tree

Properties

Flowers and berries of this plant are used for various culinary and medicinal purposes. The flowers help in alleviating ear, nose and throat infections. It serves as a good treatment for allergies and fungal diseases. It improves the functioning of the kidneys, thereby aiding in rapid excretion of the metabolic waste products of the body via the urinary system.

Elderflower infusion is known to cure viral diseases like measles and chicken pox. It also provides relief in arthritis. Fever, constipation, anxiety and depression can also be treated using elderflower. Elderflower infusion or ointment can be applied to cuts and wounds on the body. Such topical application helps overcome sunburn, heals injuries or cracks on the skin and helps soothe skin irritation. Elderberries are rich in vitamin C and help cure skin infection like rheumatism and erysipelas.

The fleshy and juicy berries of the plant are used to prepare jams, jellies, ketchups and chutneys. Elderflower and elderberries are also used to make refreshing summer drinks and coolers. They are also used to make elderberry wine and champagne. Elderberry cordial when taken hot with sugar, right before bedtime, is a traditional remedy for curing colds.

Warnings

Leaves and branches are poisonous and not fit for consumption. There is possible risk of cyanide toxicity, gastrointestinal distress, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal cramps and weakness associated with the consumption of leaves, stems, roots or bark. Allergies like skin rashes, irritation or difficulty in breathing may also develop. Pregnant or breastfeeding women should not consume it as they may run the risk of birth defects or miscarriage.

Cultivation

It easily grows in waste or uncultivated land, in hedges or in wooded areas. It can propagate from seeds, cuttings and rootstalks. Normally spring time is suitable for sowing the seeds of the plant. Its soil requirements consist of sandy, loamy soil with adequate water. It prefers moisture along with full or partial sunlight. Flowers are harvested in late spring while harvesting of the elder berries is carried out in autumn.

Protect the plant from birds and animals like hummingbirds, squirrels, rabbits, bears, foxes, deer *etc.* as they may destroy the plant for food and nest.

Epazote

Epazote (*Chenopodium ambrosioides*) also known as ‘Wormseed’ is native to Mexico and the tropical regions of Central and South America. It belongs to the Chenopodiaceae family. The stems bear multiple branches with small jagged edged green leaves on it. This annual plant is about 1m tall and bears clusters of small yellow flowers along the stems. The small cluster of fruits contains numerous small black seeds.



Common Names

Epazote refers to the Nahuatl words "eptl" and "tzotl" spoken by native people of central Mexico. These words mean an animal with an

Amasamas, Amush, American Wormseed, Anserina, Apasote, Camatai, Cashua, Chenopode, Contegras, Erva-De-Santa Maria, Herbe A Vers, Jerusalem Tea, Jesuit's Tea, Mastruco, Meksika Cayi, Paiku, Paico, Pazote, Semen Contra, Spanish Tea **Properties**

Some of the properties of Epazote include – antibacterial, anti-parasitic, anti-malarial, amebicide, insecticidal and vermifuge. It is also considered to be antacid, analgesic, anti-inflammatory, carminative, antiseptic, antispasmodic, laxative and stimulant. Epazote plant is considered to be one of the best remedies against intestinal worms, parasites and amoebas. The carminative characteristic of the plant helps in reducing gas. It is also known to aid in nervous disorders, asthma and menstruation problems. Cough, cramps, gout, hemorrhoids and bronchitis can be treated using the leaves and other parts of the plant. Additionally, it is also believed to help in healing wounds, improving digestion, increasing breast milk production, as well as preventing ulcers.

Epazote is used liberally in Mexican cuisine and forms an important ingredient in black-bean recipes. It is also used to season soups, quesadillas, enchiladas, tamales and various cheese and egg-based recipes.

Warnings

Some people are put off by the intensely pungent odor of this herb, which is believed to be fairly reminiscent of gasoline! Also, intake of the herb in large proportions can be hazardous. The toxic effects of the essential oil may lead to cardiac problems, respiratory disruptions, sleepiness, vomiting and weakness.

Cultivation

Epazote plant can be easily cultivated in your kitchen garden, but since it is not a common herb, procuring its seeds may be a little difficult. Once cultivated it may keep on multiplying naturally in the subsequent seasons without the need to replant the seeds. Sandy and rocky soil is preferred with considerable exposure to sunlight. Heat and light should be adequately available for the seeds to germinate in good order. At least 2 feet distance between two plants is needed to ensure proper growth.

Fennel

Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare* Mill.), also known as ‘spice of angels’, belonging to the Apiaceae family is believed to have originated in the Mediterranean region. The plant grows up to 8 feet tall and is sweetly scented. It bears small yellow flowers beautifully arranged on umbels. The oval shaped fruits (also referred to as seeds) about 1 cm long and slightly curved are greenish-yellow in color.



The ancient Greeks knew Fennel by the name "marathon". It grew in the field, in which one of the great ancient battles was fought and which was subsequently named the Battle of Marathon after this

Common Names

Common Fennel, Hsiao-hui-hsiang, Large Fennel, Roman Fennel, Shatapushpa, Shih-lo, Sweet Fennel, Tzu-mo-lo, Wild Fennel, Xiao-hue-xiang

Properties

The entire Fennel plant including stems, leaves, fruits, and roots is edible. Fennel is used in gripe water to relieve colic and is also known to help in heartburn and constipation. Fennel is also believed to help relieve premenstrual cramps and other such disorders. The essential volatile oils in the plant are known to enhance food absorption in the body and help treat digestion related disorders. It is considered to be antiseptic and is believed to help in curing urinary infections. The herb is also an excellent detoxification agent that enables quick evacuation of body wastes. Application of Fennel oil can aid in reducing joint pains, helps in treating arthritis, abdominal pains, toothache and earache. Fennel seeds are known to be of great help in dealing with kidney-stone problems.

Fennel is widely used as a culinary herb to season sauces, salads, vegetables, bread, stir-fries, pies *etc.* Finely chopped stems and leaves are used as herbal stuffing as well as to add flavor to marinades. Fresh Fennel leaves can be used in various fish recipes. Fennel seeds are ground and used as a spice or as an ingredient of a spice mixture.

Warnings

Some people may not be able to tolerate Fennel very well and may experience a few side effects upon consuming the herb. Fennel oil should not be ingested or used in cooking as it may lead to nausea, vomiting, or seizures. Fennel has estrogenic properties and hence is not recommended for pregnant women.

Cultivation

Fennel is widely cultivated in temperate regions across the world. It requires well-drained, non-acidic, good quality, deep soil. It can grow in shaded areas but grows best with adequate sunshine and sufficient water. Germination takes place after 10-14 days of planting the seeds. Fennel can also be grown in pots and containers. Plants can be harvested throughout the summer season.

Fennel is susceptible to whiteflies, aphids and other such pests and insects that may severely damage the plant. It is also vulnerable to root rot and frost.

Fenugreek (leaves)

Fenugreek (*Trigonella foenum-graecum*), also known as ‘Greek hayseed’ belongs to the Fabaceae family. Its origin is in southern Europe, western Asia and the Mediterranean region and is widely cultivated in India. The normal height of the plant is 2 feet with delicate, long stems. The light green leaves are slightly bitter with a pungent, yet pleasing aroma and contain a set of 10-20 aromatic seeds.



Common Names

In various areas of North Africa the seeds (ground into a paste) were traditionally eaten by women to gain weight, in combination with sugar and olive oil.

Bird's Foot, Billy-goat Clover, Camel Grass, Common Fenugrec, Foenugreek, Goat's Horn, Greek Hayseed, Methi, Trigonella

Properties

Highly aromatic, Fenugreek leaves are considered mildly laxative and have a cooling effect. They can help in treating indigestion, flatulence and a sluggish liver. They are also said to help lose excess body weight and to cure dizziness, drowsiness and general fatigue. Infusion made of fresh Fenugreek leaves is said to cure mouth ulcers. Fresh juice of Fenugreek leaves is said to prevent hair loss, cure dandruff and promote new hair growth. If used in a face mask, it is said to reduce wrinkles and fine lines.

Fenugreek seeds are also known for their anti-diabetic property. They are also considered excellent to treat arthritis and to reduce blood cholesterol. They also increase breast milk production in breastfeeding mothers. Fenugreek contains natural expectorant properties and is considered ideal for treating sinus and lung congestion. It also helps in loosening and removing excess mucus and phlegm. The mucilage content of the seeds help to cure external boils, burns and ulcers.

Fenugreek leaves as well as seeds are used extensively in Indian, Sri Lankan, and Middle Eastern cuisine. Fresh leaves are used in stir-fried dishes, added in stews, and curries. Dried leaves are also used for the potent, intense flavor they add to various recipes. Whole as well as ground Fenugreek seeds are used as a seasoning for curries and spice blend. They are also used in pickles, chutneys, and sauces.

Warnings

Fenugreek may slightly lower blood sugar levels, so if suffering from diabetes and on any other medication, ensure that you are aware of this property of Fenugreek. Pregnant women should also consume it after consulting with a physician because of its high estrogen content and ability to stimulate the uterus.

Cultivation

Fenugreek is a herb gardener's delight, it is fuss-free and very easy to grow. It ideally requires good, well drained soil if it needs to be cultivated in open areas. It can also be grown indoors in pots. Ensure that the plant gets enough sunlight and an adequate water supply. Spring is the best period to sow the seeds and it takes 3 – 5 months to mature. It can tolerate a pH range of 5.3 to 8.2. The plant is susceptible to fungal diseases like Cercospora leaf spot.

Garlic Chives

Garlic Chives (*Allium tuberosum*), a perennial herb, is native to Asia and a member of the Alliaceae (onion) family. The plant has long green shoots, a tiny bulb, and white flowers and closely resembles regular chives in appearance. However, while regular chives have a mild flavor similar to onions, Garlic Chives are true to their name and have a strong garlicky flavor.



Garlic Chives have flat blades
(leaves) and regular Chives have

Common Names

Chinese chives, Chinese leek, Garlic Chives, Ku chai or Ku Ts'ai, Gau Choy, Oriental Garlic Chives, Nira

Properties

In Chinese medicine, Garlic Chives are considered to be *yin* or a warming food. They have been traditionally considered to have healing and rejuvenating properties. Garlic Chives are a good source of calcium, iron, vitamin C, thiamine, carotene and riboflavin. They help in treating fatigue and serves as a counter-poison. It can help in controlling inordinate bleeding. Leaves and bulbs are used for external application on insect bites and wounds. The seeds are known to cure kidney, liver and digestion problems. The strong aroma helps in keeping insects and plant disease away. The herb is also thought of as being effective in reducing blood cholesterol and blood pressure. Garlic Chives contain a sulphur-rich mustard oil that is believed to aid digestion and help promote the flow of blood.

Garlic Chives are packed with garlicky flavor and are used in stir-fries, stews, sauces, egg-based recipes and seafood. They are great substitutes for garlic on those days when you don't feel like peeling and smashing garlic cloves. The fresh leaves and flowers can be used to garnish salads and soups and add a hint of aroma to these recipes.

Warnings

Those who cannot tolerate any member of the onion family (are allergic to); including garlic, onion and chives should probably avoid garlic chives.

Cultivation

Garlic Chives are fascinating, useful and a beautiful herb to grow in your kitchen garden. It can be cultivated indoors in a pot, container or out in the garden. Organic and fertile soil is favorable for cultivation which should be kept adequately watered during the growth season. It can flourish if well-exposed to the sun. Seeds are very tiny and should be planted $\frac{1}{4}$ inch deep and about 1 inch apart. Germination can take up to a fortnight. Harvest Garlic Chives by clipping them close to the ground.

Though considered to be a pest-free plant, it may be affected by fungal diseases in soggy conditions.

Ginkgo Biloba

Ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*) trees are one of the oldest trees living on earth (for more than 150 million years) are dioecious gymnosperm according to their botanical classification. This means that male and female trees are separate, and the seeds have a fleshy outer layer. Once believed to be extinct, the trees were rediscovered in China in the mid 1700s. The tree can reach about 100 feet height, has medium green fan-shaped leaves that are dichotomously ribbed, on long petioles, and usually have a slit in the middle of the upper leaf blade. The female tree produces abundant and malodorous tan-orange oval fruits in September and October.



The word Ginkgo is derived from the Japanese word ginkyo, meaning "silver apricot", referring to the fruit, which is eaten in Japan.

Common Names

Bai Guo, Fossil Tree, Ginkgo, Ginkgo Tree, Ginkgo Nut, Japanese Silver Apricot, Kew Tree, Maidenhair Tree, Yin-hsing

Properties

Traditional Chinese Medicine uses Ginkgo seeds abundantly in treating several ailments. Ginkgo leaf extract has been used to treat a variety of ailments and conditions, including asthma, bronchitis, fatigue, and tinnitus (ringing in the ears). It is also believed to improve memory; to treat or help prevent Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia; to decrease intermittent claudication (leg pain caused by narrowing arteries); and to treat sexual dysfunction, multiple sclerosis, and other health conditions.

The antioxidant property of Ginkgo is believed to prevent blood clotting and serves as a good remedy to prevent strokes and heart attacks. It also reportedly serves as an excellent remedy for high blood pressure, angina and arteriosclerosis. It is believed that asthma can be effectively cured by the antiallergenic and anti-inflammatory properties of the herb.

The roasted nuts of the trees form an important part of traditional Chinese cuisine. Used in Congee, they are served in wedding occasions as well as at the time of New Year. In Japan, the cooked seeds are consumed along with other delicacies as well as added to recipes like '*chawanmushi*'. The seeds are canned and sold as 'White Nuts' in Asian grocery stores.

Warnings

Moderate consumption is harmless. Mild diarrhea, nausea, restlessness, vomiting, headache, stomach upset etc can be the result of excessive intake of Ginkgo Biloba. Self prescription should be avoided and consulting a medical expert can help prevent any possible adverse consequences.

Cultivation

Not so fussy about the soil specifications, these trees can grow well in most kinds of soil as long as they are kept well-drained. They propagate from seeds and can tolerate full sun to partial light. The soil pH requirements may range from 5.1 to 7.5 depending upon the acid content of the soil. It requires regular adequate watering to grow at its best, however, its growth rate is slow.

Goldenseal

Goldenseal (*Hydrastis Canadensis*) is a perennial herb indigenous to Canada and eastern United States. Also known as 'Yellow root', it belongs to the Ranunculaceae family. The stem is hairy and purplish above the ground and yellow below the ground where it connects to the yellow rhizome. The dark green toothed leaves contain 5 to 7 lobes. Its small greenish-white flowers are erect and terminal with no petals but numerous stamens. Fruit appears similar to the Raspberry but it is not edible.



Common Names

The American aborigines used the Goldenseal root as a yellow dye to color their clothing and weapons.

Eye Balm, Eyeroor, Goldenseal, Ground Raspberry, Indian Dye, Jaundice Root, Ohio Curcuma, Orange Root, Yellow Eye, Yellow Indian Paint, Yellow Paint Root, Yellow Puccoon, Wild Curcuma

Properties

Goldenseal is essentially a healing herb and does not have any culinary usage. The rhizome and roots of this herb is used for several herbal medications. This herb is believed to have several medicinal properties including hepatic, alterative, anti-catarrhal, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, laxative, emmenagogue, and oxytocic.

Goldenseal has been traditionally used to treat skin disorders, digestive problems, liver conditions, diarrhea, wounds, sore and inflamed gums, ulcers and eye irritations. Herbal tea made using this herb is said to help in sore throats. Goldenseal tincture can be used as a mouthwash or gargle for inflamed gums and mouth ulcers. The herb is used as an expectorant and stimulates the secretion and flow of bile. Goldenseal is also used in topical antimicrobial ointments to cure skin irritations, wounds and rashes.

Warnings

Goldenseal usage should not exceed its recommended dosage. If Goldenseal is ingested in large quantities, it can produce convulsions and may prove fatal. High doses can cause mouth and throat irritation and may lead to paresthesia, paralysis, respiratory failure, and in extreme cases even death. Goldenseal should not be used by pregnant or lactating women. Those with high blood pressure or heart conditions should also avoid using Goldenseal.

Cultivation

Goldenseal grows extensively in mountainous areas of North America. Well-drained, fertile soil and a partially shaded location (60% to 75%) are highly suitable for cultivation. It propagates from rootstalks as well as seeds. Rootstalks can be planted in autumn keeping about 8 inches distance between two plants in a row. It will take 3-4 years to grow completely and the rhizomes then can be plucked in the autumn and dried in the open air.

Goldenseal should be protected from some common insects, invertebrate pests and diseases. They may also be damaged by animals such as deer.

Hawthorn

Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) is a deciduous shrub or small tree indigenous to Europe, North America and East Asia and grows across the temperate regions of the northern hemisphere. This long lasting tree bears small berry-like fruits (also known as Haws) that are bright red in color when ripe. It may grow up to 30 feet in height. The small white flowers, with five petals and numerous red stamens are moderately fragranced.



Common Names

In Gaelic folklore, Hawthorn is believed to mark the entrance to the otherworld and is strongly associated

English Hawthorn, Haw, May, May Blossom, Maybush, Mayflower, May Tree, Quick-set, Shan-cha, Thorn-apple Tree, Whitethorn

Properties

Hawthorn has been traditionally used in European, Chinese and American herbal treatments as a remedy for heart problems because of its antispasmodic, cardiac, sedative and vasodilatory properties. It is particularly beneficial for treating Angina pectoris, Atherosclerosis, congestive heart failure and hypertension (high blood pressure). The astringent effect of Hawthorn berries is known to help in diarrhea and dysentery. The astringent bark of the plant is believed to treat malaria and other fevers. It may also be beneficial in treating acne, seborrhea and such other inflammatory conditions affecting skin.

Relaxant properties of the leaves, flowers and berries is thought to increase appetite, alleviate stagnation of food in the intestines and help in insomnia, restlessness and agitation, reduce stress and anxiety. Hawthorn is also known to be a diuretic that helps to cure fluid retention problems and is a treatment for kidney stones. It also helps women to deal with menopause. Generally the herb is consumed in the form of a tea or tincture for medicinal purposes. It is said that the prolonged and diligent use of the herb can give better and effective results.

Young Hawthorn leaves are used in salads. The haws (berries) can be consumed raw as well as cooked. They are used to make jams, preserves and to add flavor to brandy and wine.

Warnings

Hawthorn is considered to be very safe for consumption. However, large amounts of hawthorn may cause sedation and/or a significant drop in blood pressure, possibly resulting in faintness.

Cultivation

Hawthorn is an easy to grow plant and can grow in most kinds of soil. However well-drained, moist and loamy soil is favorable for better growth. Adequate sunlight is necessary to get fruits of optimum quality. This hardy thorny plant can be grown in pastures as well as in the form of hedges. Ensure that seedlings are transplanted at least every 2 years.

The plant is susceptible to fireblight, various insect species and caterpillars of the Lepidoptera species.

Herbes de Provence

Herbes de Provence or Provençal Herbs are a traditional blend of aromatic herbs originating in the Provence region in France and hence the name Herbes de Provence. This classic herb blend generally includes Rosemary, Thyme, Bay Leaf, Savory, Fennel, Marjoram and Basil. You may add (or remove) the herbs as per your taste preferences. Other popular herbs that may go in this blend are Lavender, Sage, Chervil and Tarragon.



Properties

The herbs that are included in this exquisite herb blend have their own unique medicinal and healing properties. And collectively, their health benefits are heightened and they also impart their signature flavor to the recipes that use this herb blend.

Herbes de Provence go phenomenally well with most recipes from the Mediterranean region. They are traditionally mixed with olive oil and are used as a marinade or rub for fish or poultry. They are also coated on vegetables, meat or poultry before roasting or grilling. This herb blend is also used as a seasoning for pizzas, sauces, salads, soups and stews.

Hops

Hops (*humulus lupulus*) is a perennial vine-like dioecious (male and female flowers are on separate plants) plant belonging to the Cannabaceae family, native to Europe, Asia and North America. The root is stout and the stem that arises from it every year is long, of a twining nature, flexible and very tough. It is also prickly and has a tenacious fiber. The dark green leaves are heart-shaped and lobed, on foot-stalks, and are typically placed opposite one another on the stem. The flowers spring from the axils of the leaves. The male flowers are in loose bunches, 3 to 5 inches long. The female flowers are in leafy cone-like catkins, called strobiles. Fully developed strobiles are about 1 ¼ inch long, oblong in shape and rounded, consisting of a number of overlapping, yellowish-green bracts, attached to a separate axis.



Sedating property of this herb came to light when it was observed that Hops pickers got tired easily. It was discovered that, this lethargy was a result of an unknowing transfer of Hops resin from their hands to their

Common Name

European Hops, Common Hops, Lupulin, English Hop, Hops Vine, Lai-ei-ts'ao, Le-ts'ao

Properties

Hops are considered to have tonic, nervine, diuretic, anodyne and aromatic properties. The volatile oil has sedative and soporific effects while the bitter principles are stomachic and tonic. They are used to stimulate appetite and to enhance sleep. Sachets containing dried Hops leaves, flowers and fruits are often put inside pillows to ease restlessness and nervous conditions. Hops are blended with various herbs to cure stress, headaches, and depression. An infusion is very effective in heart disease, fits, neuralgia, indigestion, jaundice, stomach or liver problems, asthma and menstrual pain. Hops juice is a blood cleanser and is very effective in dealing with calculus problems.

As an external application, Hops are used with Chamomile heads as an infusion or poultice to reduce painful swellings or inflammation and bruises.

Despite its bitter taste, Hops have numerous culinary uses. Apart from being an indispensable ingredient in beer, its extract and oil are also used to flavor yeast, candy, puddings, ice creams, confectionary, *etc.* In some parts of Europe, Hops spears are blanched and served as a delicacy. Hops shoots are also cooked in a similar way to asparagus.

Warnings

Hops are not recommended for pregnant women. They belong to the same family as cannabis and should not be used for extended duration.

Cultivation

Hops are typically not started from seeds, but instead from roots or rhizomes that are planted in mid-spring. Though Hops is grown commercially, it thrives along roadsides and on dumps too. It needs well-drained, rich, light soil and bright sun to grow best. However, it can tolerate partial shade or deep sandy soil too. The plants need to be watered well. Hops are vulnerable to various fungal diseases like mildew, mite-attacks and insects like flea beetles, aphids and vine borers. Usually, these can be checked by spraying of pesticides and insecticides. However, sometimes the plants might have to be destroyed completely and grown at a different location.

Hyssop

Hyssop (*Hyssopus officinalis*) is a perennial member of the Lamiaceae family, native to southern Europe and Asia. It is cultivated in some areas of the Mediterranean and throughout North America. It is a common garden plant. Hyssop has small and narrow leaves that have fine hairs covering them. Hyssop flowers that bloom from June to October can be blue, white, pink or mauve colored. Like most plants of the mint family, Hyssop leaves and flowers contain a volatile oil that gives it a camphor-like aroma and a bitter taste.



Grow Hyssop in the cabbage patch of your kitchen garden to protect cabbage from butterflies.

Common Names

Common Hyssop, Garden Hyssop, Herb Hyssop, Hyssop

Properties

Hyssop is used as a diaphoretic and an expectorant. This combination can help in curing congestion and fevers. Hyssop is used for making herbal tea to cure coughs, colds and sore throats. It is also used in the form of an infusion or tincture to cure these problems. The infusion is also known to alleviate rheumatism and bruises.

The volatile oil present in Hyssop is widely used in various French wines and various liqueurs to lend a unique aroma. The oil is also used in various medicines to treat bronchitis and clear mild problems in the respiratory tract. Hyssop has a calming effect and can be used as a sedative for helping asthma. Its oil also acts as a solution for irritations in the digestive tract. It can help in curing colic, bloating and indigestion.

Hyssop leaves and flowers are used to season vegetables, soups, sauces, pickles, *etc.* They are also used to add a fresh minty flavor in some salads.

Warnings

Though Hyssop is known for its medicinal values, it is not recommended for pregnant women. Hyssop is believed to induce menstruation and lead to miscarriage if consumed in large quantities. People suffering from iodine imbalance should also avoid Hyssop as it is iodine-rich. Hyssop can irritate the mucus membranes; therefore, it should be used either in acute cases or when the infection is at its peak.

Cultivation

Though Hyssop is not sensitive to the soil-type, it can grow well in light, well-drained soil. It thrives in dry, rocky and limestone soils. The recommended pH range for Hyssop is 5.0 to 7.5. The seeds should be planted some weeks before the last frost date.

Hyssop is generally pest-free but its roots are vulnerable to rotting in soft and watery soil.

Kaffir Lime leaves

Kaffir Lime (*Citrus hystrix*) is a member of the Rutaceae family and indigenous to south East Asia. This is a small thorny plant that grows 3-4 m tall and bears small white aromatic flowers. The intensely aromatic leaves are dark green colored with a glossy sheen. The size of the leaves can vary quite a bit, from less than an inch to several inches long. The larger leaves are usually darker in color. The leaves have a unique characteristic – they are indented in the middle, which gives the appearance of two leaves stuck together, to look like a figure eight shape. The Kaffir Lime fruit looks like a regular lime and is dark green in color with a knobby surface.



In traditional Thai folklore, the Kaffir Lime fragrance is said to ward off evil spirits.

Common Names

Jerk Purut, Jeruk Sambal, Kieffer Lime, Makrut, Som Makrut, Thai Lime, Wild Lime

Properties

The essential oils in the fruit rind and leaves of this plant are incorporated into various topical ointments. The volatile oils present in the Kaffir Lime leaves can act as a natural stain remover and insect repellent. The citrus juice of Kaffir Lime and the essential oils derived from the rind and leaves are considered to be a good health tonic. In folk medicine, the juice of Kaffir Lime is said to promote gum health and is used in brushing teeth and gums. The rind is believed to have blood cleansing and stomachic properties that aid in proper functioning of the digestive system.

The juice is also used as a hair cleanser to keep the scalp and hair clean and fresh smelling. It is also considered to be a good remedy for lice and dandruff.

The citrusy scent of the leaves is intensified when the leaves are rubbed or bruised. They are used to add zesty, lemony essence to potpourris, herbal teas and vinegars.

Kaffir Lime leaves are used extensively in Thai cooking, Cambodian and Laotian cuisine. The leaves can be used like Bay leaves, adding them at the beginning, to release their flavor into the foods and removing before serving. Use leaves in soups, broths and curries. Very finely slivered leaves go well in salad, or can be added to cooked dishes. The zest of the Kaffir Lime fruit is an abundant source of essential oil and imparts a unique flavor to several Thai and Creole recipes.

Warnings

Kaffir Lime leaves have no significant side effects. The juice from Kaffir Lime fruits may be bitter and not palatable by some individuals, but it is not toxic.

Cultivation

Kaffir Lime plants are not very fussy about soil requirements, they will grow in a wide range of soils, preferably well drained fertile soil. The plant may grow up to 30 feet in height (typical growth is 10-15 feet), but because it is slow growing it can be grown in pots. If pruned, it can be planted in the ground and kept small. They can also be grown from seed but the plants will be thorny. Ensure that you protect your plant from extreme weather conditions. The plant is susceptible to pests including whiteflies, aphids, scales, and the citrus leafminer.

Lavender

Lavender (*Lavandula officinalis*), a perennial herb, belongs to the [Lamiaceae](#) family and native to the Mediterranean region. It is widely cultivated in Australia, Southern Europe and the United States. It grows around 1 to 3 m in height and has long, spiky, numerous stems. The oblong greyish-green leaves are narrow and curled like a spiral. The striking light purple, blue or white flowers are intensely aromatic.



Common Names

In ancient times Lavender was used for mummification and perfume by the Egyptians, Phoenicians, and people of Arabia.

Common Lavender; English Lavender; French Lavender; Garden Lavender; *Lavandula Angustifolia*; *Lavandula Latifolia*

Properties

Lavender is extensively used in aromatherapy. It is considered a therapeutic herb that helps ease anxiety, fatigue, headaches and insomnia. The herb can also be taken internally or applied topically to relieve toothaches, loss of appetite and sprains. The herb is also used as a flavoring agent for disagreeable odors in medicines or ointments. The essential oil, when taken internally, is restorative and a tonic against faintness, heart palpitations, giddiness and colic. It also uplifts the spirits, dispels flatulence and promotes appetite.

Adding Lavender oil in the bath water can have a rejuvenating and relaxing effect. The essential oil is used extensively by perfumeries and the beauty industry.

Lavender features prominently in French cuisine, particularly of Southern France or Provence. Lavender is also used as a herb, either alone or as an ingredient of Herbes de Provence. Lavender flowers can be candied and are used for decorating desserts. Lavender can be mixed with sugar, which can then be sprinkled on cakes and other patisserie items. The flowers are also blended with black tea and used to make Lavender tea.

Warnings

Lavender may counteract with some existing medication, supplements or any other treatment leading to side effects. Seek advice of your health care practitioner to avoid this. Though allergic reactions are rare to occur, some people may develop reactions like vomiting, nausea and mild headache. Pregnant or nursing women should avoid using it.

Cultivation

Considered to be a garden plant, Lavender is easy-to-grow and fuss-free. However, it prefers well-drained warm soil and sufficient sunlight. The alkaline and chalk content in the soil can be an added advantage. Extreme dampness may destroy the plant so adequate air circulation between the plants should be ensured. Care should be taken to protect the plant from winter winds. Lavender can also be grown in pots and containers.

Lemon Balm

Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*) is a perennial herb belonging to the Lamiaceae family and native to Southern Europe, Western Asia, and Northern Africa. The plant grows up to 1 to 2 feet in height and has a citrusy and refreshing scent. The leaves are deeply wrinkled and range from dark green to yellowish green in color. The two-lipped flowers are found in small clusters at the axis of the leaves and may be white or yellowish in color.



Common Names

The branches of the Lemon Balm plant were strewn on floors to freshen a room, as mentioned by Shakespeare in "The Merry Wives of Windsor".

Blue Balm, Common Balm, Cure-all, Dropsy Plant, English Balm, Garden Balm, Honey Plant, Lemon Balm, Melissa, Sweet Balm

Properties

Lemon Balm has a history of being used as a healing herb. Lemon Balm is popularly used to make herbal teas because of its calming and sedative properties. It is believed to help in reducing anxiety and to treat insomnia. This herb is also considered beneficial for a variety of health problems, including Alzheimer's, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), indigestion, gas, insomnia, and hyperthyroidism. It also has antibacterial and antiviral properties that help against scorpion or animal bites through external application. An infusion made of fresh Lemon Balm leaves help in treating depression, indigestion, nausea and anxiety. It also alleviates painful swellings and cold and flu. The highly fragrant and appealing essential oil derived from Lemon Balm leaves can be used as massage oil or ointment and applied to help relieve insect bites mosquito bites, asthma and bronchitis.

Lemon Balm has a delicate, fresh lemony flavor which makes it a great herb to have in your kitchen. Fresh leaves are used as an attractive garnish and to add zest to sweet or savory dishes. They also enhance the flavor of fresh fruit salads, green salads, herb butters, cocktails and sorbets. It works well in stuffing for poultry, lamb or pork. Its subtle flavor is particularly well suited for cooking fish and making sauces.

Warnings

Lemon balm is a therapeutic herb and has no significant side effects. However, pregnant and lactating women should avoid this herb or use it with caution.

Cultivation

Lemon Balm is prolific and grows all across the globe. It prefers rich and well-drained but damp soil. Adequate sunlight is favorable but it can grow well even in partial shade. Seeds need to be planted about 8 weeks before the last spring frost date and plants should be kept around 18-24 inches apart. Regular weeding is required. Leaves can be plucked fresh at any time during the growing season. It can also be grown indoors and will require direct sunlight for a minimum 5 hours or 14-16 hours of artificial light daily.

The plant is susceptible to powdery mildew and potential attacks by chewing and sucking insects. Generally it is considered to be a pest-free plant.

Lemongrass

Lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citrates*) is a perennial herb widely cultivated in the tropical climates of Southeast Asia, India, Sri Lanka, Brazil, Central Africa and Guatemala. This member of the Poaceae family has broad, sharp-edged and delicately perfumed grass-like leaves. The life of the plant spans over three to four years and the crop is harvested every three to five months.



Common Names

When using Lemongrass for cooking, look for stalks that have thick, firm, heavy bulbs and tightly bound green leaves. Remove the outer woody leaves to expose the white inner core.

Cymbopogon, Barbed Wire Grass, Citroengrass, Citronella Grass, Fever Grass, French Indian Verbena, Herbe De Citron, Lemon Grass, Sereh, Silky Heads

Properties

Lemongrass is known to have antispasmodic, hypotensive, anticonvulsant, analgesic, antiemetic, antitussive, antirheumatic and antiseptic properties. It has been traditionally used for treating dyspeptic disorders, fevers, colds, nervous conditions and exhaustion. The leaves and oil are also used as a remedy for indigestion. Lemongrass has a refreshing, citrusy fragrance and the essential oil derived from Lemongrass is used to manufacture scented candles, cosmetics, bath products, perfumes and deodorants.

Lemongrass stalks are used extensively in Thai, Vietnamese, Indonesian, Sri Lankan and Caribbean cooking. It is used in teas, soups, curries, pickles and in meat and seafood recipes.

Warnings

Lemongrass oil should be used in a diluted form as a flavoring agent and for topical application. Concentrated lemongrass oil can be toxic and fatal. Pregnant women should avoid consuming Lemongrass as it may cause uterine contractions and stimulate menstrual flow.

Cultivation

Lemongrass is an easy herb to grow in your kitchen garden. It can tolerate a wide variety of soils; however, calcareous soils can damage the crop. The soil must be well drained and fertilized. A warm and humid climate is ideal for cultivating Lemongrass. The crop can be propagated through seeds or slips. The seeds should ideally be sown in the last week of May or early weeks of June.

Care should be taken to prevent diseases like long smut, rust, red leaf spot, leaf blight *etc.* It is said that older leaves are more vulnerable to infections.

Lemon Verbena

Lemon Verbena (*Aloysia triphylla*) is a deciduous annual shrub that is a member of the Verbenaceae family, and native to Argentina, Paraguay, Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, and Peru. It grows in tropical regions of America, North Africa, most of Europe, China and Japan. The shrub grows up to 5 ft in height and is known for its beauty and a strong lemony aroma. It has fragrant pale-green leaves that are usually 3 to 4 inches long. The shrub has pale-purple flowers that bloom during August.



Lemon Verbena flowers, leaves and oil are used to make potpourri, linen sachets, herb pillows, and scented candles.

Common Names

Aloysia Citrodora, Lemon Beebrush, Lemon Verbena, Lippia Triphylla, Lippia Citrodora, Verbena Triphylla

Properties

Lemon Verbena is used as a remedy for alleviating indigestion, flatulence, stomach cramps and nausea. Infusion or tincture made from Lemon Verbena works as a tonic for the nervous system.

Oil extracted from Lemon Verbena leaves is known to have insecticidal properties. It is used for making perfumes. The oil is also added in various home-made lotions and creams to help in reducing puffiness around the eyes. Adding the infusion to bath water can help in softening the skin.

Lemon Verbena leaves are used in herbal tea, jams, jellies, puddings, confectionery, cakes, stuffing and ice creams to add flavor and fragrance.

Warnings

Consuming Lemon Verbena in high doses can cause vomiting and stomach irritations. Avoid stepping out in the sun after applying Lemon Verbena oil as it may affect skin pigment.

Cultivation

Lemon Verbena is an easy herb to grow and a great addition to your kitchen garden. It needs a warm and damp climate, coupled with partial sunlight and a frost-free atmosphere. During winters, Lemon Verbena must be grown indoors. It thrives in light, well-drained, alkaline soil. It is propagated through seeds or cuttings, ideally in spring. The plant is harvested during the summer when it flowers.

Lovage

Lovage (*Levisticum officinale*) is a perennial herb indigenous to the Mediterranean region and belongs to the Apaceae family. It grows throughout Europe, Southwestern Asia and United States. This hardy plant, vaguely resembling celery, grows about 3-4 feet or even higher and has 5-6 inches long thick carrot-shaped roots. The plant bears large, dark green basal leaves, on erect stalks, and is divided into narrow wedge-like segments. The leaves are shiny and when bruised they give out a pleasing aroma, somewhat reminiscent both of Angelica and Celery.



Common Names

Lovage is an ancient herb and is said to grow in Emperor Charlemagne's imperial garden.

Cornish Lovage, Italian Lovage, Lovage, Love Persley, Maggi Plant, Old English Lovage, Racine de Liveche, Sea Parsley, Smellage

Properties

Lovage leaves are considered as an emmenagogue. The essential oil derived from this herb is also useful in relieving menstrual cramps. The diuretic and carminative properties of Lovage roots and seeds help in increasing the flow of urine, disorders of the urinary tract and in releasing abdominal gas. It is helpful in treating colic, indigestion, poor appetite and bronchitis. Lovage is considered to be quite effective in the treatment of malaria, sore throat, jaundice and boils. It is also used in bath and deodorant preparations.

The roots, stems, leaves, seeds (fruits) and flowers of the Lovage plant are edible. The leaves are used in salads, soups and sauces. Seeds are used in pickles, garnishes, baked goods and egg-based dishes. Young stalks and stems of Lovage can be blanched and cooked as a vegetable.

Warnings

Lovage is not advisable for those with kidney disorders or those who suffer from oedema caused by kidney or heart problems. Pregnant or lactating women should consult with their doctor before consuming this herb.

Cultivation

Lovage prefers fertile, well-drained soil with a pH range of 5.0 to 7.6 and adequate sunshine. For the seeds to germinate, they should be sown $\frac{1}{4}$ inch deep.

The plant is susceptible to aphids, chewing insects, and fungal diseases and therefore needs to be protected.

Marjoram

Marjoram (*Origanum marjorana*) is native to the Mediterranean region. It belongs to the Lamiaceae family (mint family) and a few consider it as a species of Oregano. It is widely grown in Eastern European countries, France and United States as well as Mediterranean countries. The whole plant is aromatic and has a minty-sweet flavor with slight bitterness. The plant bears small white or pink flowers and round soft gray-green leaves. The normal height of this perennial plant is around 10 inches.



In ancient times the Greeks believed, that just like Oregano, if Marjoram grows on the grave it means that the deceased is at peace and happy in the

Common Names

Marjoram, Marjorana Hortensis, Sweet Marjoram

Properties

Marjoram has considerable medicinal value and was traditionally used as a counter-poison by the Greeks. The oil of this herb can be applied to alleviate bruises, sprains and muscular cramps. It can also serve as an agent in enabling menstrual discharge. The powder form of the herb is used in certain sneezing powders. It also acts as a stimulant, antioxidant, antispasmodic and diaphoretic.

Italian, French, Greek, Middle Eastern, American and North African cuisines make extensive use of this herb. Marjoram is extensively used in Germany in spice mixtures for producing sausages. A combination of Marjoram, Juniper and Black Pepper is used in stews. It enhances various vegetable recipes like legumes, cabbage and fried potatoes. Fresh Marjoram can enhance the flavor of fish dishes and is widely used in Southern European cooking. It is also an important component of the French Bouquet Garni, fine herbs and pickle mixtures. Marjoram is used to flavor grilled mutton and breads in western Asia. It may also be used in fish, pork, beef, lamb, chicken, tomato dishes, salads and stuffing.

Warnings

Marjoram is generally recognized as safe for human consumption as a natural seasoning, as well as being safe as an essential oil.

Cultivation

Marjoram requires adequate sunlight to grow well in an open location. It can tolerate any kind of soil and hot climates. Spring is the ideal time for planting the seeds. These small seeds may be sown, trodden and smoothed, in a wide surface area. Adequate watering is necessary in dry periods. Regular weeding is advisable because of a slower germination period. It will bloom in July and can be harvested simultaneously. New plants can also propagate from cuttings.

Marjoram is not suitable for indoor cultivation as it is vulnerable to aphids, spider mites, leaf miners and fungal diseases.

Mints

Mints (*Mentha*) are aromatic, predominantly perennial herbs belonging to the Lamiaceae family. This herb has its origin in the Mediterranean countries and Western Asia but is grown abundantly all over the world. There are about 25 species and several hundred (some say there are 600 varieties) of Mints. Mint leaves are arranged in opposite pairs, often covered with fine hair on one side, with colors ranging from dark green and grey-green to purple, blue and sometimes pale yellow.



Common Names (Varieties)

The Romans believed that consumption of Mint can add to one's intelligence level. They also associated it with hospitality and rubbed it on the tabletops or strewed it as a good sign of welcoming guests.

Apple Mint, Balm Mint, Brandy Mint, Corsican Mint, Curly Mint, Eau de Cologne Mint, Garden Mint, Ginger Mint, Lamb Mint, Spearmint, Peppermint, Pennyroyal, Phudina, Pineapple Mint, Water Mint **Properties**

Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*) is the variety of mint that is used most often commercially and otherwise. It has stomachic, stimulant and carminative properties and serves as a good remedy for indigestion, flatulence, colic, liver and intestine problems. Menthol present in Peppermint oil has the ability to alleviate stuffy nose, cold, cough, flu, fever and other such disorders.

Peppermint oil is also used in a chest rub, inhalers and in ointments to treat muscular aches and soreness. Peppermint herbal tea also contributes towards relieving menstrual cramps in women. Spearmint (*Mentha pulegium*), like Peppermint, is a good stomachic and digestive tonic. It is helpful in colic, flatulence, intestinal worms, headaches, fever and respiratory infections. It also acts as a stimulant and promotes menstruation. Spearmint infusion is known to treat skin problems like itching, eczema and other infections. Mint leaves are also used to repel insects.

Mints are abundantly used to flavor food and prepare jams, jellies, summer coolers, cocktails, candies, chewing gum, desserts, sauces, marinades and even some savory dishes. Mint oil is also used to perfume and lend its healing property to bath products, cosmetics and personal hygiene products such as toothpaste and mouthwashes. Peppermint has a stronger minty aroma than any other species and is used in bouquets, as an air freshener and in wreaths. The menthol contained in its oil is used in medicines, cigarettes, liqueurs, candies and many other products.

Warnings

Mint is not associated with any known allergies. But nursing mothers are advised to use mints with caution as it may slow lactation.

Cultivation

Most varieties of mints are relatively easy to grow. They prefer cool, moist areas with partial shade and yet adequate sunshine. The plant may be propagated by seeds, stem cuttings or by cuttings obtained by dividing existing plants. Ideal distance between two plants is 18 inches. Mints are easy to cultivate indoors, in pots and containers. However they will require a minimum 5 hours of direct sunlight.

Nasturtium

Nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*) is a perennial herb native to South and Central America and is a member of the Tropeolaceae family. It is cultivated in tropic and temperate regions across the world. It may grow 8-12 inches high; however the height may vary depending upon the varieties. The bright green leaves are rounded and shield-shaped. The brilliant-hued flowers have five petals and may be crimson, yellow, orange or cream.



Common Names

The word Nasturtium comes from the Latin word "Nasus Tortus" meaning convulsed nose, referring to the scrunched up expression people make when they experience the peppery taste of the plant.

Indian Cress, Jesuit's Cress, Mexican Cress, Nasturtium, Peru Cress

Properties

Nasturtiums are beautiful, easy to cultivate plants that are predominantly grown for ornamental purposes. However, they also have medicinal properties such as antibiotic, antifungal, antiviral and antibacterial. The herbal tea from the leaves is believed to cure coughs, cold, flu, respiratory problems as well as menstrual disorders. Leaves, when rubbed on gums, are considered to stimulate and clean them. The antibiotic property due to the high content of vitamin C and other components help stimulate metabolism, digestive system, reduce hyperthyroidism and flavonoids. The herb is also known to be effective for topical use on minor cuts, abrasions and skin infections.

The beautiful delicate tissue-like flowers as well as leaves can be best-used for garnishing salads, creamy soups, cakes, cheese and butters. It adds a sweet, tangy and slightly peppery taste to the food. They also add zest to mayonnaise, vinegars and vinaigrettes. Flower buds and seed pods may also be used in making pickles.

Warnings

Though considered to be safe for consumption, excessive consumption of the herb may lead to some side effects like vomiting.

Cultivation

Nasturtium is very easy to grow and is often the first choice for beginners. It is not so fussy about soil richness but prefers well-drained soil. Spring is the ideal time for sowing the seeds in warm areas while late spring or early summer may be suitable in colder regions. An extremely cold climate will not be suitable for this herb as it requires sufficient sunlight to flourish well. Generally the seeds should be sown 8-20 inches apart as per the variety. It is also known to self-seed and grow abundantly once established.

Nettle

Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) comes from the Urticaceae family and originated from the temperate regions in the Northern Hemisphere. However, it widely grows in Southern Africa, the Andes and in some areas of Australia. This small plant attains the height of around 2-3 feet and has erect stems. It bears dark green toothed leaves, notched like a saw, and has small, nearly invisible flowers that grow from the axils of the leaves. The plant contains male as well as female flowers, male flowers have stamens while the female flowers have a seed-producing organ. The entire plant is covered with tiny, nearly invisible stinging hairs that produce an intense, stinging pain, followed by redness and skin irritation.



Why do Nettles sting? It is because the fine hairs are filled with formic acid, histamine, acetylcholine, serotonin (5-hydroxytryptamine), plus unknown compounds. Some of these substances are destroyed by cooking, steeping, or drying, but not by freeze-drying or juicing.

Common Names

Chinese Nettle, Common Nettle, Common Stinging Nettle, Great Nettle, Great Stinging Nettle, Hsieh-tzu-ts'ao, Stinging Nettle

Properties

Nettle is used for cleansing the body and as a detoxification agent. The high potassium and flavonoids content of the herb lend it the diuretic property which helps in the production of urine as well as in effective elimination of metabolic wastes. Nettle also serves as a good remedy for poor kidney functioning and fluid retention.

The astringent property of the herb helps stop excessive bleeding in the case of cuts/wounds, nose bleeds or menstrual bleeding. Topical application of fresh Nettle juice, infusion or tincture can help effectively soothe burns and related injuries as well as helping with hemorrhoids. It is also known to alleviate insect stings and bites, skin irritation, eczema and other such skin related problems. The restorative characteristic of the herb helps lactating mothers promote breast-milk production and also helps women during menopause.

Respiratory ailments, catarrhal congestion, allergies, asthmatic attacks and arthritis are also treated with this herb. It is also thought to be an effective remedy for digestive problems like diarrhea, gas, ulcers *etc.* Arthritis and rheumatism are known to be alleviated on account of the formic acid and compound histamine contained in the herb, which promotes blood circulation.

Nettle also has culinary uses as it can be used as a green leafy vegetable such as salad greens, in side dishes (such as creamed spinach), soups, stews and so on. It is important to clean and chop nettles wearing rubber gloves. Once the leaves are cooked a little, the stingers are deactivated, and the plant becomes wonderfully edible. Fresh or dried Nettle leaves are used to make a detoxifying tea.

Warnings

Stinging Nettle obviously has a potent sting. Harvest Nettle by wearing a work glove and full sleeved shirt. Though the cases of allergic reactions or any side effects are rare, people may get skin rashes if they get into direct contact with the plant. Pregnant women should avoid using the herb as it may influence menstrual cycle. Care should be taken in the case of any existing medication or treatment that is being taken. Consulting a health care professional before consuming it is recommended

Cultivation

Nettle is a relatively fuss-free plant to cultivate. They have a perennial root system that spreads quickly. Because of this their growth is prolific – almost like a weed, which makes it very difficult to eradicate once its root system is established. Seeds can also be collected from the wild and then the roots can be divided at any time of the year.

Oregano

Oregano (*Origanum vulgare*) belongs to the Labiatae family and is indigenous to hilly Mediterranean regions. It is believed that ancient Greeks and Romans brought the herb to Europe which subsequently was naturalized across the world. The name Oregano means 'joy of the mountain' and is derived from the Greek name "Oros ganos". Oregano is a perennial plant that can grow up to 2-2.5 feet tall. The herb has erect branching stems with highly aromatic and pungent tasting leaves and clustered flowers. Greek Oregano has white flowers and wild Oregano has purple flowers. Mexican Oregano, grown for export in Mexico, is more pungent. Essential oil called origanum oil is obtained from the leaves.



Common Names

Historically, the Greeks and Romans consider Oregano as a symbol of joy and happiness. In fact, it was a tradition for Greek and Roman bridal couples to be crowned with a

Common Oregano, Italian Oregano, Greek Oregano, Mexican Oregano, True Oregano, Turkish Oregano, Wild Marjoram, Winter Marjoram

Properties

Oregano oil is considered to have antibacterial properties and is used in herbal medications to treat diseases caused by food-borne pathogens such as Listeria. Oregano is also packed with numerous phytonutrients and is believed to be a powerful antioxidant that can prevent oxygen-based damage to cell structures throughout the body.

Oregano is known to strengthen and stimulate the stomach. It helps with flatulence and promotes bile secretion. Hot Oregano tea alleviates cough, indigestion, gastric troubles and stomach upsets. Application of a paste made from dry Oregano leaves and honey is known to heal bruises. Antiseptic properties of Oregano also make it a good treatment for tonsillitis, bronchitis and asthma. It is also known to help treat mild fever, cold and flu. Topical use of Oregano oil can relieve toothache and joint pains.

This aromatic and flavorful herb is used extensively in Mediterranean cuisine. The Greeks and Italians, in particular, use Oregano liberally while cooking. It is used to flavor soups, stews, meat dishes, pizzas, pastas, vegetable casseroles, sauces, omelettes, egg-based recipes and many more. Oregano twigs and leaves are also used to flavor extra virgin olive oil.

Warnings

People who are allergic to the herbs of the Labiatae family may also get side effects from using Oregano. Some of its allergic reactions or side effects include chest pain, breathing problems, skin rashes, itching, swollen skin *etc.* People with allergies as well as pregnant women should consult their doctor before using the herb.

Cultivation

Adequate sunlight and rich, well-drained soil with some alkaline content is favorable for the cultivation of Oregano. The seeds may be planted in spring or early summer keeping about 12 inches distance between two plants. Regular weeding is necessary as plants will grow slowly. Soil should be kept well watered and new plants should be transplanted every fall. Oregano is also considered to be a good indoor plant that can be cultivated easily in pots and containers. Sunlight and regular watering should be made available for the plant to flourish. One can start harvesting leaves and stems as soon as the plant blooms.

The plant is vulnerable to aphids, spider mites, fungal disease and leaf miners.

Parsley

Parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*), a bright green, biennial herb, belongs to the Apiaceae family and is native to the Mediterranean region. Common Parsley or Curly Parsley is the most common variety and typically grows 8-14 inches tall, forming dense clumps. Italian flat-leaf Parsley is also used extensively and can grow 2-3 ft in height. The flat serrated leaves of this variety have a much stronger and sweeter flavor than the other varieties, making it more desirable for cooking. The herb has yellow flowers that bloom from June to August.



Common Names/Varieties

Parsley is believed to be poisonous for small birds, especially parrots, but is safe for animals. Hares, rabbits and sheep are particularly

Common Parsley, Curly Parsley, Garden Parsley, Hamburg Parsley, Italian Flat Leaf Parsley, Neapolitan Parsley, Rock Parsley

Properties

Parsley is largely grown for its leaves that are rich in vitamins and minerals. They are used for treating urinary tract infection, anemia and rheumatism. Topical application of bruised Parsley leaves can help in alleviating insect bites, parasites and bruises. The leaves also act as an excellent mouth freshener, and help in masking bad breath caused by strong smelling foods such as garlic and onions. Parsley is also used as an expectorant, laxative and for the treating of lung cancer, spleen disorders and breast tenderness. Parsley roots are known to have diuretic properties. The roots are used in the form of decoction. Parsley juice can help in treating gout and arthritis by promoting removal of toxins from inflamed joints. Parsley seeds are used as a medicine for treating flatulence and colic pain. Parsley oil is used in medicines to stimulate menstruation, regulate the menstrual cycle and alleviate menstrual pain.

Parsley is a popular culinary herb used extensively in Middle Eastern, European and American cuisine. Fresh Parsley is used for garnishing and adding flavor to several dishes such as soups, sandwiches, salads, stews, stir-fries and so on.

Warnings

Allergies from Parsley are rare; however, it contains measurable amounts of oxalates. For this reason, individuals with already existing and untreated kidney or gallbladder problems may want to avoid eating Parsley.

Cultivation

Parsley grows best in a sunny area which receives direct light for 6-8 hours a day, although it can tolerate some light shade. Plants will be more productive if grown in well drained soil that is fairly rich in organic matter, with a pH range of 6.0-7.0.

Parsley is notorious for its painfully slow germination process, and the best way to cultivate the plant is through seed propagation. The rate of germination depends upon seed freshness, ranging from 2-5 weeks. Parsley can be grown indoors as well as outdoors.

Perilla

Perilla frutescens is an annual herb belonging to the Lamiaceae family indigenous to East Asia, however, it is considered to be the traditional crop of China, Japan, India, Korea, Thailand and other Asian countries. It is a very pleasing plant that grows up to 4 feet tall. Its beautiful toothed leaves with the touch of purple or red and purple stems make the plant look attractive and decorative for gardens. The herb bears numerous flowers that are pink or Lavender in color.



In Japan, purple Perilla is known as *akajiso* ("red shiso") and is used to make *umeboshi* (*ume* or Japanese pickled plum), or combined with *ume* paste in sushi to make *umeshiso maki*.

Common Names

Ao Shiso, Beefsteak Plant, Ji Soo, Purple Mint, Purple Perilla, Rattlesnake Weed, Shiso, Summer Coleus, Wild Basil, Wild Red Basil

Properties

The herb has several medicinal properties such as carminative, antispasmodic, antibacterial, antimicrobial, antiseptic, antidote, expectorant, stomachic, tonic, anti-asthmatic, and diaphoretic. Perilla has been known to help cure cancers and other diseases.

Colds, cough, influenza, asthma, nausea, vomiting, constipation, abdominal pain and allergic reactions are known to be well treated and even prevented by Perilla infusion and tea. The Chinese traditionally use the stems of the plant to combat morning sickness and restless fetus in the case of pregnant women. Crushed Perilla plants make an excellent insecticide.

The essential oils of the plant are used in aromatherapy as well as in perfumes. Besides this, the seed oil is also used in varnishes, printing ink, paints, lacquers and for waterproof cloth coatings.

Perilla or Shiso as it is known in Japan is used extensively in Oriental cuisine. They add a unique flavor to soups, pickles, rice, stir-fries and fish recipes. Fresh Perilla leaves and young seed pods are widely used in tempura, salads, and miso soup. Some people use the fresh leaves as a side dish with raw fish. This use is intensely practical; the raw leaves are powerfully antiseptic and prevent food poisoning. The oil extracted from the seeds (slightly reminiscent of dark sesame oil) is used to flavor candies and sauces. Perilla seed can be cooked with meals, roasted, crushed to intensify its taste and/or mixed with sesame and salt.

Warnings

Pregnant or nursing women should avoid consuming Perilla or consume it after consulting with their health care practitioner.

Cultivation

Easily cultivable, Perilla grows widely in open fields and woodlands, waste sites, roadsides *etc.* This non-fussy plant requires light to moderately well-drained and rich soil. Exposure to full sun is preferred.

Rosemary

Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) is a woody, perennial herb with pine needle-like leaves belonging to the Lamiaceae family. It is a native of the Mediterranean region but grows throughout much of the temperate regions in Europe and America. The shrub grows up to a height of 3 to 5 feet. Its straight, long and needle-shaped leaves are dark green at the top and white on their underside with a strong spicy aroma. It bears small, pale, dew-like flowers that can be white, pink, purple or blue in color.



Rosemary is a traditional symbol of commemoration and life-long friendship, and its branches are often carried by wedding couples as a sign of love and fidelity.

Common Names

Compass Weed, Dew of the Sea, Garden Rosemary, Incensier, Mary's Mantle, Mi-tieh-hsiang, Old Man, Polar Plant

Properties

Rosemary is believed to be a good tonic, and has diaphoretic and astringent qualities. Rosemary oil has carminative properties and acts as a stomachic. Rosemary helps to relax the smooth muscles of the digestive tract and uterus. It is, therefore, used to soothe digestive upsets and relieve menstrual cramps. Tea brewed from Rosemary leaves can act as a tonic to calm anxious nerves and can also be used as an antiseptic. It also has anti-inflammatory properties which help in treating asthma, bronchitis and other such respiratory disorders. It may also improve blood circulation and increase blood flow to the head and brain.

It can be applied externally as well as added to other medicinal oils to alleviate muscle pains. It can also be used as a hair tonic as it can help condition and strengthen the hair. Bath water infused with Rosemary can be rejuvenating and invigorating.

Rosemary is a hugely popular culinary herb. It goes particularly well with lamb and other game meats. Rosemary sprigs can be added to soups, stews and casserole dishes and the sprigs are removed just before serving.

Warnings

Rosemary is a relatively safe herb to use. However, excessive use of Rosemary can cause intestinal irritation and menstrual cramps.

Cultivation

Rosemary can be propagated from cuttings of the twisted wood of non-flowering branches in early summer. It can also be grown from seed. Choose a sheltered position and well-drained soil, and ensure that there is sufficient sunshine for the plant to flourish. It can be cultivated easily in containers and pots. Harvesting of leaves, flowers and stems can be carried out at any time. However, leaves and stems contain the best flavor just before the plant blooms, so they should be picked accordingly.

Proper care should be taken to protect the plant from spider mites and mealy bugs. It is also susceptible to attacks from swarms of insects as well as rotting of the roots in soggy soil.

Rue

Rue (*Ruta graveolens*) is a hardy perennial that belongs to the Rutaceae family and is native to the Mediterranean and Southern Europe. The sub-shrub has alternate bluish-green leaves that taste bitter and yellow flowers that bloom from June to September. The plant exudes a strong, acrid odor that can be nauseous to some.



Common Names

Rue is the national plant of Lithuania. A Lithuanian bride traditionally wears a little crown made of Rue, which is a symbol of maidenhood. During the wedding ceremony, this crown is burned, which symbolizes the end of childhood and commencement into the world of

Common Rue, Countryman's Treacle, Garden Rue, German Rue
Herb-of-grace, Ruta

Properties

Rue is one of the oldest known garden plants that were grown for medicinal uses. The entire herb is believed to have healing properties. It is considered stimulating, antispasmodic and emmenagogue. Rue can also help in improving the digestive system by curing colic, constipation related problems, clearing intestinal worms as well as for cough and croupy infections. An infusion made from Rue is also used as an eyewash to relieve strained eyes. Pulp or tincture made from Rue shoots just before blooming is used as an ingredient in homeopathic medicine to relieve rheumatic symptoms, bruises, tendon injuries, pain in the sciatic nerve and strain in the eye. Rue is believed to alleviate infection after tooth extraction.

Rue has also been used as a remedy for multiple sclerosis and Bell's palsy. It is also used to cure other neural disorders like hysteria, epilepsy and vertigo.

The herb is believed to have antiseptic and astringent properties and is used to repel insects and pests. Dried Rue is tied up in Muslin bags and hung in closets and cupboards to deter insects. The herb is also grown in the garden to curtail pests.

Historically, Rue was used extensively in Middle Eastern cuisine as well as in traditional Roman cuisine. However, because of its bitter taste and unpleasant aroma, it is hardly used as a culinary herb in modern cuisine.

Warnings

Rue is not considered safe for pregnant women as it can induce menstruation. Large doses of Rue can lead to violent gastric pain, vomiting and systemic complications that can cause death in extreme cases. Due to its irritating effect on the gastrointestinal tract, Rue should not be taken or used by individuals with bladder, kidney, liver, or stomach conditions. The volatile oil has an irritant quality and may result in kidney damage and hepatic degeneration if ingested.

Rue is potentially toxic and should be consumed with caution.

Cultivation

Rue is an easy herb to grow and maintain. It grows best in climatic conditions similar to the Mediterranean region, partial shade and dry conditions. However, it is tolerant to most soils and weather conditions. It can be propagated through seeds, root slips or cuttings during the spring.

Sage

Sage (*Salvia officinalis*) is a small evergreen perennial belonging to the Lamiaceae family native to the Mediterranean and Southern Europe and is cultivated across the world. It grows about 1 foot or more in height with soft, velvety, hairy, pale-green egg-shaped leaves. The plant bears two-lipped white or purple flowers.



Common Names

"Cultivate poverty like a garden herb, like sage."

Common Sage, Dalmatian Sage, Garden Sage, Meadow Sage, Red Sage, Scarlet Sage, True Sage

Properties

Sage leaves are used to prepare herbal tea that is known to alleviate sore throats, sore gums and cough. It also helps in tonsillitis and gets rid of mucus from congested lungs. This tea is also considered to be a good remedy to stop the flow of extra breast milk past nursing stage of women.

Application of crushed Sage leaves is known to provide relief in swelling, itching, eczema and psoriasis. Its antiseptic property helps against respiratory infections and improves the immune system. It is a good remedy for fever, cold, asthma and bronchitis. Sage helps discharge phlegm and relieves inflammation.

Sage oil consists of medicinal properties such as antibacterial, antifungal and antiviral. It has a relaxant effect on the digestive tract which helps improve appetite and digestion. It helps with nausea, diarrhea, colitis and liver problems. It is also known to stimulate the menstruation flow in women and alleviate menstrual cramps. The estrogenic property of the plant is considered to be a good remedy for menopausal problems like hot flushes and night sweats.

Sage is used extensively in cooking as an aromatic culinary herb. It has been traditionally considered as a digestive aid and is often combined with fatty foods such as pork, liver or pate and sausages. It is also used to add flavor and aroma to poultry, stuffing, soups, stews, gravies and pickles. Sage can be a little overpowering because of its strong flavor and aroma so it is best used sparingly.

Warnings

Sage can be toxic if overused. It should also be avoided by pregnant women and by those suffering from epilepsy.

Cultivation

Sage is easy to grow and can tolerate most kinds of soil. However, well-drained, loamy soil makes an ideal choice. The tolerable soil range is pH 4.9 to 8.2. Full sun is preferable but it may also grow well in light shade. The ideal time for sowing the seeds is 2 weeks before the last spring frost date and seeds should be sown in the soil ½ inch deep or less. The plant may also propagate from cuttings and layering. It can be easily grown in containers as well as pots. However, it's best to grow Sage outdoors as it does not thrive very well indoors.

This plant is vulnerable to fungal diseases, spider mites and rotting of roots.

Savory

Savory (*Satureja*), native to the Eastern Mediterranean and Southern Europe, belongs to the Lamiaceae family. It has about 30 species, annuals as well as perennials, of which Summer Savory and Winter Savory are more common and popular. This small plant, which hardly grows above 50 cm tall, has a slightly peppery and minty flavor. The plant bears beautiful whorled flowers that may be white, pale pink or Lavender in color and has a narrow foliage.



A subspecies of Savory (*satureja thybra*) is named after the village Thybra which is close to ancient Troy. A flavored wine - thybritis wine - is made today in much the same way ancient Greeks made it - by placing Savory in a funnel through which the wine or pressed grape juice is poured into the amphora or

Common Names/Varieties

Creeping Savory, Mountain Savory, Summer Savory, Thyme-leaved Savory, Winter Savory

Properties

Savory herb has numerous culinary and medicinal uses. Some of its medicinal properties include expectorant, carminative, appetite stimulant and anti-flatulent. Savory also aids women in regulating their reproductive systems and is beneficial during pregnancy. Its warming nature makes it a good remedy for chest problems. Kidney and bladder ailments can also be treated with the help of this herb.

It is also known to have antifungal and antibacterial properties. Savory infusion is said to alleviate bronchitis and asthma. The ointment form of the herb is considered to be a good remedy for mild skin irritations and related problems. Savory sprigs are used to rub on bee stings and to soothe the inflammation.

Savory also has extensive culinary usage. It goes very well with bean recipes and is widely used in European and Latin American cuisine. It is used in various foods like corn, grilled vegetables, stuffing, *etc.* It also adds taste to beef and lamb stews, sausages and potato recipes. Savory has a unique flavor and can be used as a salt substitute. Savory sprigs are also used to flavor vinegar.

Warnings

There are no known adverse effects of this herb and it is usually considered to be safe for consumption. However, excessive consumption should be avoided.

Cultivation

Often regarded as an easy-to-grow garden plant, Savory is grown in many parts of the world. Its requirements are no more than well-drained soil and adequate sunlight. It can tolerate poor soil and dry or moist soil. It can be cultivated in containers and pots indoors, provided it is exposed to sun routinely.

Sea Buckthorn

Sea Buckthorn (*Hippophae rhamnoides*) is a dioecious shrub that comes from Europe and Asia and is a member of the Elaeagnaceae family. It widely grows in many parts of Western Europe, Central Europe and Asia. The plant usually grows up to 6 m tall (it may grow up to 18 m in some cases). The branches are dense, rigid and thorny while the linear or lanceolate shaped leaves are 3 to 8 cm long and less than 7 mm wide. The leaves are dark grey-green on the upper surface and a distinct pale, silvery-grey on the lower surface. Sea Buckthorn fruit can vary in both shape and color, but are typically globose to egg-shaped berries ranging from yellow to bright orange in color. The combination of fruit shape and size, together with the contrast between the color of the fruit and leaves, contributes to the ornamental value of this plant.



Sea Buckthorn is mentioned in ancient Greek Texts. *Hippophae* means "bright shining horse". It is believed that the Greek soldiers fed the fruit, leaves and branches to their horses because of which the horses had healthy, shiny coats.

Common Names

Sandthorn, Sea Berry, Sea Buckthorn, Siberian Pineapple, Swallowthorn

Properties

The berries are rich in Vitamin A, C and E, folic acid, flavonoids, essential oils and other nutritional elements. Sea Buckthorn is also known to have antioxidant properties. It is considered to be used in the treatment of cardiovascular disorders, gastrointestinal problems, ulcers and liver ailments. Liver cirrhosis is said to be alleviated with the help of this herb. It helps reduce and regulate inflammation and pathogenic thromboses. Apart from this it is also known to be of great help in cancer therapy.

The healing nature of the plant aids in skin problems like burns, injuries, eczema, and so on. Topical application of the essential oil extracted from the berries help nourish and rejuvenate the skin. It is known to prevent wrinkles, dry and rough skin as well as pre-mature aging of skin. It is widely used in Eastern and Western alternative medicine. The oils are also thought to improve mucous conditions and help in ulcers and other gastrointestinal disorders.

Sea Buckthorn leaves are an excellent source of important vitamins and minerals and is used to make a nutrient rich herbal tea. Sea Buckthorn berries are edible and nutritious, though very acidic and astringent. The juice from Sea Buckthorn berries is often blended with other sweeter juices such as apple or grape juice. The berries are also used to make jams, pie fillings, liquors and lotions.

Warnings

There are no reports of serious side effects from using Sea Buckthorn.

Cultivation

Sea Buckthorn prefers dry and sandy areas; however it is not so fussy about the soil requirements. It can grow well in light, medium or heavy (clay) soil with a neutral acid and alkaline content. It will grow as a tree or a small shrub in accordance with the type of soil, watering and climate. It can tolerate drought and maritime exposure. The plant may take about 5 years to mature completely.

Senna

Senna (*Cassia acutifolia*, *Cassia Senna*) is a large genus of about 260 species of flowering perennials belonging to the Caesalpinaceae family and has its origin in Egypt, Nubia, Saudi Arabia, India and tropical Africa. Alexandrina Senna and Tinnevely Senna are the two most recognized species of Senna among others. This small shrub attains a height of around 2 feet with smooth, long and erect branching stems. It bears leaflets in four or five pairs, about an inch in length, oblong in shape and greyish-green in color. The flowers are small and typically yellow, and the pods are broadly oblong and contain five or six seeds.



Common Names

Another species of Senna, Cassia obovata, is used as a hair treatment with effects similar to henna, but without the characteristic red color.

Aden Senna, Alexandrian Senna, Cassia Aethiopica, Cassia Angustifolia, Cassia Lanceolata, Cassia Lenitive, Cassia Officinalis, Cassia Senna, East Indian Senna, Egyptian Senna, Nubian Senna, Senna Acutifolia, Sene De La Palthe, Tinnevelly Senna

Properties

Senna is essentially a healing herb and has no culinary uses. Senna is considered to be a potent purgative and laxative. The leaves are considered to be a stimulant and specifically help in chronic constipation. Senna infusion is a strong cathartic that may help women after delivery. Topical application of leaves salve traditionally helped to treat skin disorders like acne and ringworm.

Senna pods also contain cathartic acids and emodin that have its effect on the whole intestine via increasing peristaltic movements.

Warnings

It has a slightly nauseating taste which may lead to mild sickness or griping pains in some people. It is not advisable to consume it in the case of hemorrhoids, inflammation of the alimentary canal, prolapsus, *etc.* Considering its cathartic properties it should be consumed along with aromatic and carminative herbs to avoid colic and griping pains. Excessive use should be avoided and ensure that you seek doctor's advice before consuming the herb.

Cultivation

Senna can be propagated by seeds and cuttings. It can tolerate most kinds of soil including a saline one. Spring or early summer is the ideal time for plantation. It prefers adequate sunlight to flourish at its best. It takes less than a fortnight for the seeds to germinate. Leaves can be harvested while or before the plant blooms and pods should be picked when ripe, in autumn.

Sorrel

Sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*), belonging to the Polygonaceae family, is a hardy perennial that grows wild in Asia, Europe and North America. Generally it grows up to 2 feet tall and bears juicy stems and edible oblong leaves. It produces reddish-green blooms in whorled spikes; they turn purplish as they grow.



When adding sorrel, cut back on the amount of lemon and vinegar in the recipe. It's a good herb for those on salt free diets because it adds flavor without salt.

Common Names

Cuckoo Sorrow, Cuckoo's Meate, Gowke-Meat, Green Sauce, Jamaican Sorrel, Sour Sabs, Sour Grabs, Sour Suds, Sour Sauce, Spinach Dock, Red Sorrel

Properties

Sorrel is believed to sharpen the appetite, assuage heat, cool the liver and strengthen the heart. It is also considered to be helpful in the treatment of scurvy. Decoction made of Sorrel flowers may help in the treatment of jaundice and kidney stones. The seeds and roots have an astringent property and are thought to help in hemorrhage. Powder or infusion made of Sorrel root may also treat intestinal ulcers. The herb is also believed to have diuretic and mildly laxative properties.

Sorrel juice has the ability to cure itching, ringworm and also serves as an effective gargle for sore throats.

Sorrel has a zesty, lemony flavor and is used extensively in cooking. Sorrel leaves may be pureed and used in soups, stews or may be used in salads. They can also be steamed or boiled and used as a substitute for spinach in making side dishes like creamed spinach.

Warnings

Sorrel roots are highly purgative and should be used with caution. Possible side effects may include dehydration, abdominal colic, or digestion disorders. Pregnant or lactating women should consume sorrel after consulting with their physician first.

Cultivation

Widely found in pastures and propagated from seeds, this plant is easy to grow. Garden Sorrel prefers damp soil and adequate sunlight. Spring is the ideal time for sowing the seeds, keeping around 6 inches distance between them. In order to germinate in good order, seeds should be sown $\frac{1}{4}$ inch deep in soil. It may take 1 week to germinate.

Tarragon

Tarragon (*Artemisia dracunculus*) belongs to the Compositae family and is a native of the Caspian Sea area and Siberia. This is an aromatic perennial herb that is largely cultivated in Western United States, Southern Asia and Europe for its aromatic leaves. Around 2 feet tall, Tarragon contains delicate, long and narrow dark green colored leaves and tiny round flowers with yellow-black heads.



Common Names

In the middle ages, the pilgrims, while on a long journey, used to fill their shoes with Tarragon sprigs believing that it would give them

Artemisia, Dragon's Wort, Estragon, French Tarragon, German Tarragon, Little Dragon, Mugwort, True Tarragon

Properties

Tarragon leaves are attributed with aperient, stomachic, stimulant and febrifuge properties. Tea made by infusing fresh Tarragon leaves is said to help treat insomnia and hyperactivity. The vinegar made of fresh Tarragon leaves contains digestive enzymes and is considered effective in digestion system disorders. It aids in mild stomach ailments like stomach upsets, indigestion, loss of appetite *etc.* It is regarded as having diuretic and detoxification properties and stimulates the production of bile.

The leaves infusion is believed to help alleviate flatulence and colic, arthritis, rheumatism and gout. It also works to regulate the menstrual cycle as well as depression. It is thought to be effective in removing worms from the body. The anesthetic and antibacterial properties of the leaf and root make it an excellent topical application in the case of toothache, cuts and sores.

Tarragon is used extensively as a culinary herb in French Cuisine. Tarragon leaves have a warm, lingering aroma and flavor reminiscent of licorice and anise. They are added to salads, sauces, vinegars, fish and seafood dishes. Tarragon features prominently in classic French recipes such as remoulade sauce, tartar sauce, béarnaise sauce, French dressing, and veal Marengo. It is also an unmistakable and essential component of French Fines Herbes and Herbes de Provence.

Warnings

There are no known side effects of the herb. However, it should be consumed cautiously as it may lead to allergic reactions in some people. Avoid cooking Tarragon for too long as it may bring out the bitterness in the herb. Also, chewing on Tarragon leaves may leave your tongue feeling a little numb.

Cultivation

This fuss-free herb tolerates most kinds of soil and is easy to grow – be it outdoors in your garden, or indoors in containers or pots. Ideal cultivation requirements include well-drained good soil and a warm dry atmosphere. Soil pH range should be 6.0 to 7.5. Propagated by cuttings and root division, this plant requires full sunlight, partial shade may also be acceptable. Spring is the ideal time for plantation.

Once established, plants should be divided every year so as to avoid entangled roots. Replacing the plants every 3-4 years is advisable as the older the plants grow they lose their effective flavor.

The plant is considered to be pest-free, though care should be taken to prevent rotting of roots in soft and watery soil.

Thyme

Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris L.*) is a perennial herb, native to the Mediterranean and is widely cultivated in Europe and the United States. It is a popular shrub from the Lamiaceae family grown for its ornamental appeal as well as for its culinary usage. There are numerous varieties of Thyme – broadly divided into bush and creeping Thyme. Common or Garden Thyme is the one most commonly used for cooking and is a woody plant with grey-green leaves that grows about one foot tall. Common Creeping Thyme or Mother of Thyme is a ground covering variety growing about 4 inches and forming thick, dark green foliage. Thyme flowers are edible and may be white, pale pink, bright pink, or mauve.



Common Names (Varieties)

Ancient Greeks considered Thyme a symbol of courage and sacrifice.

Broussoneti Thyme, Camphor Thyme, Caraway Thyme, Creeping Thyme, English Thyme, French Thyme, Lavender Thyme, Lemon Thyme, Golden Lemon Thyme, Lime Thyme, Mother of Thyme, Nutmeg Thyme, Thyme, Wild Thyme, Woolly Thyme

Properties

Thyme is a warming and aromatic herb with astringent, antifungal, antiseptic and antispasmodic properties. Thyme tea is beneficial in the treatment of whooping cough, cold, flu, bronchitis, and disorders of the gastrointestinal tract such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), colic and spastic colon. Thymol, which is the primary and most active component of Thyme, is renowned for its antiseptic and antifungal properties and is a principal ingredient in Listerine mouthwash.

External application of a salve made from Thyme can help in relieving stings, athlete's foot, ringworm, scabies and lice. It is known to help in reducing rheumatic pain. It is also said to promote hair growth and is sometimes used as a hair tonic to treat dandruff and hair loss.

Thyme is a highly fragrant herb. Both fresh and dried Thyme is used to enhance the flavor of meat, poultry and seafood recipes. Thyme is a popular ingredient in French, Italian and Caribbean cuisine. It goes particularly well with beans, lamb, eggs, tomato based sauces, and is used to flavor butters, oils and cheeses. Fresh Thyme leaves and flowers are also used as a garnish.

Warnings

Thyme and Thyme oil are usually considered safe, but external application on the skin may cause stinginess and irritation. Thymol should be handled with caution – if ingested in large doses, it may cause nausea, vomiting, gastritis, headache, dizziness, convulsions, coma, cardiac arrest, and respiratory collapse. Avoid fresh Thyme during pregnancy or if you are suffering from high blood pressure.

Cultivation

Garden Thyme grows well with drained, light soil with a pH level ranging between 4.5 and 8.0. It needs open space and ample sunlight to grow best. Thyme plants need 15 to 20 cm distance between each other. Thyme seeds need about 2 weeks for germination. The seeds should ideally be planted about 8 to 10 weeks before the last frost date. The seeds should be sown indoors and transplanted outdoors when there is no danger of frost. Thyme can be propagated through seeds, layering and stem cuttings.

Thyme is known to be affected by extremely wet or soggy soil and may succumb to root rot. Care should be taken to protect the plant from insects and pests.

Conclusion

Herbs are timeless. Right from the pages of ancient scriptures to contemporary theses, herbs have been written about and appreciated. Its wonders have been acclaimed by cosmeticians, herbalists and scientists alike. Why, even poets and dramatists have glorified them with the same fervor!

Through this e-book, we have opened up a window to the exotic world of herbs. As you go along, we're sure that you'll find many more fascinating things to explore and savor.

Feel free to write back to us with your feedback, experiences, recipes or discoveries.

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