

FEVERFEW



Tanacetum parthenium

[TAN-uh-SEE-tum par-THEN-ee-um]

also *Chrysanthemum parthenium*

Family: Compositae

Names: febrifuge plant, featherfew, quinine, bachelor's button; Mutterkraut (German); grande camomille (French); erba madre, camomilla grande (Italian); altamisa mexicana

Description: Small, bushy herb, strongly scented with a height up to 4 feet and a width of 2 feet. The flowers are daisylike, with white petals and raised yellow center 1 inch in diameter, clustered together with up to 30 heads. The leaves are yellow-green, divided and flexible, shaped like miniature oak leaves 3 inches long. It blooms from June to August.

Cultivation: A perennial hardy to Zone 4, it will grow in almost any soil though production is higher in fertile soil. Prefers full sun or partial shade and can survive drought conditions. Deer don't bother it and rare for pest or disease problems. Bees dislike it so don't plant around other plants requiring bee

pollination. Seeds germinate easily in 10-14 days. Cover seeds lightly. Transplant in late spring/early summer with a spacing of 12-18 inches in the row and rows at 24 to 30 inches. Cuttings do not readily root and the mature plants will self sow readily. Tops are harvested just as the flowers are forming. For commercial purposes best harvest is the second year with year three having a smaller one and at that point it should be tilled under. An acre should yield between 1,000 and 4,000 pounds. Flowers dry easily in 4-6 days. Easily shipped fresh and some of feverfew's most important constituents break down readily. Should be sold within 6 months of harvest.

Constituents: essential oil (alpha-pinene), sesquiterpene lactones (parthenolide, santamarine); sesquiterpenes (camphor)

History: Originally from the Balkan peninsula and western Asia, the herb grows wild all over the northern hemisphere. The generic name is of uncertain origin, but may come from *tanaos* an altered form of "athanasia" meaning long-lived because of the duration of flowering; its emmenagogic property is associated with the Greek *parthenos*, virgin. The Greeks called it *pyrethron*, probably from *pyro*, meaning "fire", descriptive of its taste. This became *pyrethrum* to the Romans. Feverfew was first designated botanically as *Matricaria* as a close relative of chamomile. Since then, it's been joined with the chrysanthemums and the pyrethrums. Old England knew it as featherfoil which became featherfew and eventually feverfew. It was after the plant acquired the name that herbalists tried using it for fevers. In the Victorian language of flowers feverfew stands for fire, warmth, protection.

Properties: bitter, anti-inflammatory, analgesic, tranquilizer, emmenagogue, carminative, purgative

Energetics: bitter, cool

Meridians Affected: stomach and liver.

Medicinal Uses: Children with colic have been given the leaves to chew. A tea made of the dry, ground leaves is used to treat bad colds, indigestion and diarrhea. To relieve constipation, a suppository made of dry leaves, honey, and soap has been used in New Mexico. The dried flowers are used to treat indigestion and kill intestinal worms.

When the wife of a Welsh doctor ended her 50-year-old history of migraine with a course of feverfew, a detailed scientific investigation of feverfew got underway and in clinical trials in Britain during the 1980s the herb was demonstrated to be an effective remedy for migraine. 20 headache patients eat fresh feverfew leaves daily for 3 months and stop using headache-related drugs during the last month. After they were given capsules of .37 grains of freeze-dried leaf every day, they experienced less severe headaches and fewer symptoms, including nausea and vomiting, than a placebo group. As an added benefit, their blood pressure went down. Despite extensive research, the exact nature of its action is not yet understood, but the constituent parthenolide appears to inhibit the release of the hormone serotonin, which is thought to trigger migraine. The parthenolides in feverfew do not work by the same method as salicylates. While many herbalists feel the fresh leaves, or an extract made from them, are preferred, results have been seen with fresh, freeze-dried, and air-dried leaves, although boiling feverfew tea for 10 minutes instead of steeping it did reduce its activity in one study. As a preventative it should be taken in small quantities (3 leaves a day) regularly. The herb can help arthritic and rheumatic pain, especially in combination with other herbs.

The herb has been used since Roman times to induce menstruation. It is given in

difficult births to aid expulsion of the placenta. It has not been shown to cause uterine contractions, but because of its history in promoting menstruation pregnant women should probably not use it.

In South America where feverfew is naturalized, it has been effective for colic, stomachache, morning sickness and kidney pains. In Costa Rica, it has also been employed as a digestive aid and emmenagogue. Mexicans have used it as a sitz bath to regulate menstruation as well as an antispasmodic and tonic.

Feverfew is useful for cats as an alternative to aspirin, which is toxic to felines. Use a glycerin-based tincture or a cooled tea with a dose of 12-20 drops of the tincture or ½ tsp of a strong tea for each 20 pounds of the animal's weight, twice daily. Pets can be bathed in a cooled tea as a flea rinse.

Dosage: For prevention of migraines take a 100 mg capsule per day. At the start of a migraine take 5-10 drops of the tincture every 30 minutes at onset. Best for "cold" type migraines, involving tightening of the cerebral blood vessels and eased by applying a hot towel to the head.

Scientists at the University of Rochester Medical Center have found that an extract of feverfew is effective against a type of human leukemia. Monica L. Guzman, PhD, and Craig T. Jordan, PhD, reported that feverfew extracts kill malignant stem cells like no other single therapy they have tested. The active ingredient is derived from parthenolide, one of a class of sesquiterpene lactones found in the plant. The US National Cancer Institute (NCI) has been sufficiently excited by this work to accept it into the rapid access program, which aims to move experimental drugs from the laboratory to human clinical trials as quickly as possible. This feverfew extract is the first agent known to destroy myeloid leukemia at the level at the stem cells. Increasingly, cancer research is homing in on these primordial cells as the source of cancer. An increasing number of scientists believe that unless cancer is attacked at this level it can rarely be controlled, much less cured. A 2006 study from Clemson

University in North Carolina showed that parthenolide, considered the primary bioactive compound in golden feverfew, has anti-tumor activity. The scientists studied it against two human breast cancer and one human cervical cancer cell line. Feverfew...extract inhibited the growth of all three types of cancer cells. Of four feverfew components, parthenolide showed the highest inhibitory effect, although the other compounds work in concert with it in inhibiting cancer. A 2004 phase I clinical trial from Purdue University in Indiana gave patients oral doses of feverfew, with up to 4 milligrams (mg) of parthenolide. The daily oral tablet was "well tolerated without dose-limiting toxicity." However, curiously, it did not provide detectable concentrations in the blood. So its exact mode of action remains a mystery (Currey 2004).

Combinations:

Premenstrual Tea: 1 tsp each vitex berries and wild yam rhizome; ½ tsp each burdock root, dandelion root, feverfew leaves and hops stobiles; 1 quart water. Combine herbs and water in a pot and bring to a boil. Turn off heat and steep for at least 20 minutes. Strain out herbs. Drink at least 2 cups daily, as needed. Can also be taken as a tincture.

For acute states of rheumatoid arthritis, add up to 2 ml tincture 3 times a day, to other herbal remedies.

Drink a weak infusion after childbirth to encourage cleansing and tonifying of the uterus.

Migraine formula: 3 parts feverfew; 1 part lemon balm; ½ part passion flower; 1 part rosemary; 1 part sacred basil; 2 parts ginkgo leaf freeze-dried capsules or tincture. Pour 1 quart of hot, steaming water over 6 tablespoons of herbs and steep, covered, 5-15 minutes. Drink ½ cup every hour until symptoms subside. The herbs can be taken as a tincture, 4-6 times a day, 30-60 drops.

Cosmetic Uses: An infusion of the herb in boiling water and allowed to cool is used externally to apply to the face to remove freckles and soreness. It was used in a 17th

century beauty preparation made by Gervase Markham.

Complexion Milk: Place a handful of leaves and flowers in a pan and cover with a ½ pint of milk. Simmer for 20 minutes, let cool, and strain into bottles. It will nourish a dry skin and remove blackheads and pimples.

Toxicity: Problems such as mouth ulcers and soreness and occasional digestive disturbances have been reported in about 18% of those using feverfew on a regular basis.

Ritual Uses: Gender: Masculine. Planet: Venus. Element: Water. Power: Protection. Carry with you for protection against colds and fevers as well as accidents.

Culinary Uses: Feverfew has been added to food to cut the greasy taste but is extremely bitter and disagreeable to most palates.

Recipes:

Feverfew-Cucumber Sandwich

1/3- ½ cucumber, peeled and sliced very thin
2 feverfew leaves, chopped fine
2 tsp cream
salt and pepper
butter
2 thin slices of bread

Place the cucumber slices in a bowl. Top with the chopped feverfew leaves. Pour the cream over the cucumber and feverfew. Add salt and pepper. Allow to stand at least 30 minutes. Thinly butter the slices of bread. Cover one with the cucumber slices and top with the second slice. (The Herbal Epicure)

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Resources:

Companion Plants, www.companionplants.com
plants, seeds

Crimson Sage, <http://www.crimson-sage.com>
Plants

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