

PEPPERMINT



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Mentha x piperita (hybrid cross between *M. aquatica* and *M. spicata*);

Family: Labiatae

Names: lamb mint, mentha Montana, Lammint, Brandy Mint; Pfefferminze (German); menthe poivree (French); pepermint (Dutch); menta piperita, menta inglese, menta pepe, menta piperita, menta peperina (Italian); Mieta pieprzowa (Polish); menta, hortela (Spanish); nespereira da Europa, hortela (Portuguese); myata (Russian); yang-po-ho (Chinese); seiyo-hakka (Japanese); na'na, nannaul-habagul hindi (Arabic)

Description: The stem of peppermint is erect, usually branched 2-3 feet high, reddish or purple, very thinly hairy and the tall square

stems are lanceolate, sharply serrated, subglabrous to thinly hairy. The leaves of peppermint are shortly but distinctly stalked 2 inches or more in length and $\frac{3}{4}$ -1½ inches broad. The underside of the leaf sometimes shows fine hair and a large number of oil glands. The coarsely serrated leaves can be pure green to reddish green. The whorled clusters of little reddish flowers are in the axils of the upper leaves forming loose spikes and rarely bear seeds. The corolla is lilac and the bracts lanceolate, about as long as the flowers. Peppermint is not a pure variety, but a crossing of various kinds of mint; the plant is sterile and only propagated by its abundant runners, leading from a woody center root. They run partly above and partly below the ground. The difference between black and white peppermint is mainly in the color of the leaves (black is more purple) and the stronger pungency of the black. It also has thicker stems than the white and grows higher. It is more prolific in oil and stronger. Black-stem peppermint has small, smooth, slightly pointed dark green leaves, purplish-black stems and pale purple flowers.

Cultivation: Peppermint is an herbaceous perennial that grows to 3 feet in height. The square stems often have a purple tinge. Grow in full sun or partial shade in moist but well-drained soil and can be propagated by division, stem cuttings, root cuttings and layering. It benefits from an annual root pruning. Peppermint can be grown fairly well indoors.

History: Mintho, the beautiful nymph who gave her name to this herb was loved by Pluto, god of the underworld. Persephone grew jealous of Mintho and turned her into a fragrant, lovely plant, which to this day waits at the shady edges of Pluto's dark realm. Used to

flavor everything from chewing gum to medicine. An old, forgotten purpose for peppermint was to use the leaves to scour and clean wooden tables because it left behind a clean, fresh scent that helped the appetite. A peppermint-scoured table was considered a mark of hospitality. Peppermint: warmth of feeling; cordiality; wisdom. The ancient Egyptians cultivated peppermint and a 13th century Icelandic pharmacopoea includes it.

Constituents: essential oil, mentol menthone, fasmone, tannic (labiatic acid), bitter principle

Properties: diaphoretic, aromatic, carminative, calmative, mild alterative

Energetics: spicy, bitter, slightly cool

Meridians/Organs affected: lungs liver

Medicinal Uses: Peppermint is used for colds, flu, fevers, gas and mild digestive disorders. Peppermint also contains antioxidants that help prevent cancer, heart disease and other diseases associated with aging. From Jim Duke's "Green Pharmacy" comes a Stone Tea for gallstone attack: brew a mint tea from as many mints as possible especially spearmint and peppermint and add some cardamom, the richest source of borneol, another compound that is helpful. When prepared whole (1 stem in 1 cup water, in a decoction to be inhaled, it clears the respiratory tract.

The oil of peppermint has been shown to be antimicrobial and antiviral against Newcastle disease, herpes simplex, vaccinia, Semliki Forest and West Nile viruses.

Menthol is an allergic sensitizer that may cause hives. The menthol in oil of peppermint is an effective local anesthetic. It increases the sensitivity of the receptors in the skin that perceive the sensation of coolness and reduces the sensitivity of the receptors that perceive pain and itching. Menthol is also a counterirritant, an agent that causes the small blood vessels under the skin to dilate, increasing the flow of blood to the area and making the skin feel warm. When you apply a

skin lotion made with menthol, your skin feels cool for a minutes, then warm. Menthol's anesthetic properties also make it useful in sprays and lozenges for sore throats.

Combinations:

Colds and influenza: boneset, elder flowers and yarrow

Dosage:

Infusion: pour a cup of boiling water on a heaped tsp of the dried herb and leave to infuse for 10 minutes. Drink as desired.

Tincture: Take 1-2ml 3 times a day.

Analgesic Oil: 1 ½ cup well-dried peppermint, 2 cups cold-pressed olive oil

Combine the 2 ingredients in a bottle or glass jar. Store away from light for 1 month and shake every 2-3 days. Strain. Use in the case of pain, headaches, intestinal or muscle cramps, by massaging or by applying a topical compress depending on the area requiring treatment. Can be kept for 1 year away from light.

Flower Essence: For those that are dull or sluggish, especially mental lethargy; unbalanced metabolism which depletes mental forces. Peppermint brings great healing and balancing energy, freeing the mind for higher thought, and helping the digestive, life forces work in their proper sphere.

Aromatherapy Uses:

EXTRACTION: essential oil by steam distillation from the flowering herb

CHARACTERISTICS: a pale yellow or greenish liquid with a highly penetrating, grassy-minty camphoraceous odor.

BLENDS WELL WITH: benzoin, rosemary, lavender, marjoram, lemon, eucalyptus and other mints

ACTIONS: analgesic, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, antiphlogistic, antipruritic, antiseptic, antispasmodic, antiviral, astringent, carminative, cephalic, cholagogue, cordial, emmenagogue, expectorant, febrifuge, hepatic, nervine, stomachic, sudorific, vasoconstrictor, vermifuge

CONSTITUENTS: menthol, menthone, menthyl acetate, menthofuran, limonene, pulegone, cineol, among others

USES:

Skin Care: acne, dermatitis, ringworm, scabies, toothache

Circulation, Muscles and Joints: neuralgia, muscular pain, palpitations

Respiratory System: asthma, bronchitis, halitosis, sinusitis, spasmodic cough

Digestive System: colic, cramp, dyspepsia, flatulence, nausea

Immune System: cols, flu, fever

Nervous System: fainting, headache, mental fatigue, migraine, nervous stress, vertigo

Other Uses: flavoring agent in pharmaceuticals and ingredient in cough, cold and digestive remedies. Flavoring agent in many foods, especially chewing gum and confectionery, alcoholic and soft drinks, also tobacco. Fragrance component in soaps, toothpaste, detergents, cosmetics, perfumes, etc.

Use peppermint' scent to increase concentration, to stimulate mind and body and to stay awake. Externally, the essential oil is used in balms and liniments as a combination cooling and heating agent that stimulates both hot and cold nerve endings and increases blood flow to the area.

PEPPERMINT ESSENTIAL OIL RECIPE

If you have access to lots of fresh peppermint, you can make essential oil. The leaves contain up to 4% oil, which can be removed by solvent extraction. Pick 2 cups of fresh peppermint leaves. Gently rinse them to remove any pesticides or spores. Pat them dry with a paper towel and allow to air-dry overnight on a rack (this prevents mold growth). Loosely fill a glass jar with leaves, then fill it with vodka. Close the jar tightly and keep it in a cool, dark place. Shake gently every day for two weeks, then strain into a clean jar. Use cheesecloth to squeeze extra liquid from the leaves. Discard the leaves, and put the jar of liquid in your freezer for three hours. The essential oil will freeze, the alcohol will not. Carefully pour the

alcohol into a clean jar for the next batch. Store the oil in glass in a cool, dark place. Do not use it undiluted. Use the oil as medicine, as flavoring, or in soaps, perfumes, massage oils, and bath salts.

Ritual Use: Gender—Cold; Planet—Venus; Element—Air; Basic Powers: Healing, Purification; Specific Uses: add to healing incenses and charms. Rub onto the patient, if possible, especially over the afflicted area. Also burn to cleanse the house in Winter and inhale the fragrance of the crushed leaves if you have trouble falling asleep. Folklore held that peppermint would enhance one's ability to dream of the future. For those pursuing the science of dream magick, peppermint is most valuable. It may be taken as a bedtime tea to improve the mystical nature of one's dreams. Peppermint may be used as an incense at sunset, then on into the evening to bring dreams of prophecy. There are those who believe peppermint is an herbe which honors Zeus and helps connect one's ritual work to the Divine Male energies of the Universe. Peppermint works well with topaz and chalcedony. The oil may be used to intensify the natural magick of these gems. Peppermint can be placed where these gems are stored to keep their energies intact. Peppermint brings joy as well as good fortune. It cleanses stagnation, creating room for opportunity and success.

Peppermint Chervil Sachet: To bring happiness, luck and protection. Combine equal quantities of dried chervil and peppermint and sew them into a sachet. Wear it against your skin during the day. Sleep with it under your pillow at night.

Peppermint Floorwash: Make a strong infusion of peppermint by pouring boiling water over the dried botanical. When it cools, strain out the peppermint and add the liquid to a bucket of floorwash rinse water. Add vinegar and a little cascarilla powder. Cleanse the floors and threshold areas to radiate an invitation to happiness and good fortune.

Cosmetic Use: The oil improves with age and retains its strength for 10-12 years. It provides “coldness” to toilet preparations and is mixed with bay rum in after shave lotions. It also adds an invigorating fragrance to soaps and bath essences. The oil rubbed onto the teeth improves their whiteness, the reason for its inclusion in toothpaste.

Minty Mustard Foot and Ankle Soak

1 /4 cucumber (chopped, do not peel)
1/ 2 lemon (peeled, seeded)
4 gallons water
1 cup chopped fresh mint
1/ 8 tsp mustard powder or 3 mustard leaves
1 tsp lemon extract
1/ 4 cup peppermint extract

In a blender, mix cucumber and lemon on medium speed until smooth. In a large pot, heat water until boiling and add mint. Remove from heat and let sit until temperature becomes manageable for your feet to soak in. Transfer to a plastic bucket or container large enough to hold mixture. Make sure that water level is high enough to cover ankles. Add cucumber, lemon, mustard, and extracts and stir. Soak feet and ankles for 15 minutes, or until water cools. (Blended Beauty)

Face mask: Mix to a paste 4 oz brewer’s yeast and a tablespoonful of witch hazel. Add a few drops of peppermint essence to improve its astringent qualities. Apply to the face and forehead and lie down with the eyes closed. Leave on for 30 minutes. Then wash off in lukewarm water containing a little lemon juice, and apply a moisturizing lotion.

Toxicity: Peppermint can reduce milk flow, so take internally with caution if breastfeeding. Commission E notes that peppermint oil should not be used without professional help in individuals with obstructions of the gallbladder, gallstones, or severe liver disease. The commission states the same caution for peppermint leaf in cases of gallstones. Peppermint and menthol are reported to have caused allergic reactions in some adults and

children. It is also warned not to apply peppermint oil to broken skin.

Culinary Uses: The flavor of peppermint is generally too strong for uncooked foods but the leaves can enhance cooked foods, especially hearty soups, sauces, jellies and lamb.

Recipes:

Eggplant and Peppermint Soup

1 Tbsp oil
1 medium onion, peeled and finely chopped
1 small clove garlic, peeled and crushed
2 medium potatoes, peeled and diced
1 ½ lb eggplant, finely sliced
2 pints hot chicken stock
salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 eggs
1 Tbsp grated Parmesan cheese
1 Tbsp chopped fresh peppermint
pinch of nutmeg

Put the oil, onion and garlic in a large bowl. Cook in the microwave, uncovered, on high for 2-3 minutes to soften, then add the potatoes and cook on high for 2 minutes. Stir in the eggplants and cook on high for 3-4 minutes. Stir in the stock, salt and pepper, cover and cook on high for 5-15 minutes until the vegetables are soft. Pour into a food processor blender, purée and then return the liquid to the bowl. Beat the eggs, cheese, peppermint and nutmeg together. Gradually add to the soup, whisking continuously. Cook, uncovered, on high for 3-5 minutes or until hot, stirring once. (The Herbal Yearbook)

Mint Daiquiri

6 limes
½ cup sugar
4 cups water
5 large peppermint sprigs
¾ cup plus 2 Tbsp light rum
2 Tbsp clear crème de menth

Squeeze enough limes to make ½ cup lime juice. Dissolve the sugar in the lime juice and add the water. Adjust the taste with more lime juice or sugar. Soak the large mint sprigs in the limeade, bruising the leaves a bit against the side of the pitcher. Add the rum and crème

de menthe. Chill the mixture for at least 30 minutes. Serve the daiquiris on the rocks with a small sprig of fresh mint for garnish. (Herbs from the Kitchen)

Chocolate Peppermint Muffins

4 cup all purpose flour
1 ¾ cup cocoa
2 ½ cup sugar
1 ½ tsp baking soda
½ cup ground dried peppermint or ¾ cup finely minced and crushed fresh peppermint
1 1/3 cup oil
4 eggs
1 ½ cup buttermilk
1 Tbsp vanilla
1 ½ cup mini-chocolate chips

Mix together flour, cocoa, sugar, baking soda, baking powder, peppermint (if using dry) and chocolate chips. Set aside. Mix together peppermint (if using fresh) oil, eggs, buttermilk and vanilla. Pour wet ingredients into the dry and mix all together just till moistened. Fill paper lined or greased muffin cups ¾ full. Bake at 375F just till tops spring back – 15-20 minutes. Test often as the “brown” muffin color doesn’t show if it is overbaked. Makes 18. (Madison Herb Society Cookbook)

Herb Liqueur #2

1 fifth brandy
1 sprig (large) sweet basil with flowers
1 sprig parsley
1 sprig (small) lovage
8-10 sprigs peppermint
1 sprig (leaves only) bee balm
1 sprig (leaves only) pineapple sage
4 sprigs spearmint
1 fresh bay leaf
3 sprigs oregano with flowers
3 young fennel leaves
1 fist full of lemon thyme and winter savory
8 allspice berries
½ tsp coriander seeds (crushed slightly)
½ tsp dried orange peel
2 cups sugar

Mix all ingredients in glass jar and steep for 4-6 weeks. Stir or shake daily until sugar is dissolved. Strain, decant and rebottle. This has

sugar added with the herbs and spices. It’s a little sweeter and thicker. Serve it mixed 50/50 with brandy on ice. (The Madison Herb Society Cookbook)

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Resources:

Companion Plants, www.companionplants.com
plants
Crimson Sage, <http://www.crimson-sage.com>
Plants
The Rosemary House, www.therosemaryhouse.com tincture

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