

The Many Benefits of Herbs!

Flavorful Kitchen Herbs

- 1) CHIVES - Used for flavoring and garnishing when a mild onion flavor is desired. Add at end of cooking to maintain the best flavor. Best in egg dishes, salads, potatoes, sauces, and soups.
- 2) DILL - Cooling and aromatic herb. Flavors egg dishes, fish and seafood, rice, potatoes, soups, and lamb stews. Sprigs are added to pickles and vinegars.
- 3) SUMMER SAVORY - Good seasoning for peas, cabbage, stuffing, and meats. Flavor is hot and peppery. Also key flavor in Czech potato pancakes.
- 4) THYME - Clovelike flavor. Use sparingly in soups, marinades, stews, sauces, and stuffings.
- 5) OREGANO - Pungent herb often used in Italian, Greek, and Mexican cooking.
- 6) PARSLEY - Loaded with vitamin C, iron, calcium, and beta-carotene. Used in Japanese, French and Mexican cooking.
- 7) CILANTRO - Bold tangy flavor used in salsas, salads, soups and sauces.

Source: Old Farmers Almanac

DIY Medicinal Herbal Tea

Herbal teas, as well as being delicious to drink, help soothe and balance the body and mind with regular use. A few things to keep in mind when creating teas:

- If using fresh herbs, double the quantity recommended for dry (typically recipes refer to dry measurements), and if using dried herbs, make sure to dry them properly to ensure the best flavor and nutrition.
- You should make sure your herbs are organically grown (we do not treat our herbs with any chemicals at Painters, and you should avoid doing so once you take them home).
- When preparing your measurements, weight the herbs rather than using a ruler – much more accurate!
- When steeping teas, avoid using aluminum, as it can react with the chemicals in the herb and affect the product (all metals can affect the taste of the tea, so best to avoid metal overall).
- Do not steep herbal teas for too long. Lengthy steeping can extract excessive quantities of tannin and the action of the herb may alter dramatically. For example, rosemary

(Rosmarinus officinalis) tea, when steeped for 5-10 minutes, is a mild soporific (inducing or tending to induce sleep), but left for too long it can have quite the opposite effect.

- Drink tea after meals so they don't interfere with digestion. Many actually aid digestion when drunk after large or irritating meals (try peppermint or fennel).

Basic Herbal Tea Recipe

1-t dried herb(s) or 2-t fresh herbs

1-cup boiling water

Directions: Pour the boiling water over the herb(s) or place the herbs in a tea strainer and immerse in water. Leave it to steep for 5-10 minutes, then remove your strainer or strain the tea and enjoy! Start with peppermint or chamomile, but once you feel comfortable with the process, start experimenting with blends.

Some great medicinal (and tasty) herbs to try:

Calendula (Calendula officinalis) flowers: indigestion, skin troubles

Catnip (Nepeta cataria) leaves: headaches, restlessness, digestive aid, infection prevention

Chamomile (Matricaria recutita) flowers: headaches, nervousness, indigestion, ulcers, arthritis, and infection prevention

Chickweed (Stellaria media – found in most yards): coughs and colds

Lavender (Lavandula angustifolia) flowers: headache and nervousness

Lemon balm (Melissa officinalis) leaves: headache and insomnia

Lemongrass (Cymbopogon citratus): refreshing and uplifting

Peppermint (Mentha piperita): flatulence and nausea

Plantain (Plantago major – found in most yards): colds

Red clover (Trifolium pretense – found in most yards) flowers (simmer): colds, skin problems, and blood cleanser

Rosemary (Rosmarinus officinalis): circulation, nervousness, depression, food poisoning preventive, and decongestant

Sage (Salvia officinalis): fevers, tonic, wounds, digestive aid, blood sugar regulation, and sore throat

Thyme (Thymus vulgaris): colds, indigestion, and cough remedy

Valerian (Valeriana officinalis): tension and headaches

Yarrow (Achillea millefolium- typically grown as an ornamental): colds, indigestion, and cough remedy

Remember, there are no definite rules for combining herbs in a tea mixture. Don't love the taste of your creation? Add one of these herbs as a flavor enhancer/sweetener:

Peppermint (Mentha piperita)

Fennel (Foeniculum vulgare)

Ginger (Zingiber officinale)

Lemon balm (Melissa officinalis)

Lemon verbena (*Aloysia citriodora*)

Additional "flavor ingredients" that can complement your herbal teas include rose petals, citrus peels and dried apple or peach. Make sure you only use organic fruits and untreated roses! For a refreshing treat on a hot day, try serving your favorite tea on ice or mix the chilled infusion with one or more fruit juices to create a unique punch. You can also try mixing in club soda to make a healthy alternative to soda!

If you want to build up a stock of dried herbs and flavorings, try following this procedure:

Gather leaves or blossoms in mid-morning, after most of the dew has evaporated. (If the leaves are dusty, wash them in cold water and drain or shake off excess moisture.) Set the vegetation in a dry, warm place, out of direct sunlight. (A windowsill facing any direction other than South is ideal.) The important thing is to lay the herbage out one plant deep on a clean paper towel, dish towel, or (if you have one) drying screen. (Don't pile the herbs up ... the ones on the bottom might become moldy.) To protect the tea makings from dust, lay more paper towels — or cheesecloth — on top of them. Allow the plants to dry for about 10 days (longer, if they still feel moist), then store them in tightly closed, labeled jars. If you want to make an herbal blend, make sure to combine them in a tightly closed jar for at least 10 days to ensure proper mixing of the flavors.

Sources: American College of Healthcare Sciences and Mother Earth News

Repel Mosquitoes Naturally

While summer's warm days and long nights afford us ample time to enjoy the great outdoors, summer is also prime time for mosquitoes, bloodsuckers that can both ruin our outdoor enjoyment and carry diseases such as West Nile virus. Perusing the bug-repellent aisle at your grocery store or pharmacy, you'll find a swarm of mosquito-control products based on the chemical DEET. But before you spray yourself, your family and your yard with these products, consider the health effects. A study by the National Park Service found that test groups exposed to DEET reported side effects including nausea, headaches, dizziness, skin irritation, rashes and numb or burning lips. Researchers at Duke University also found that long-term exposure to DEET can kill brain cells and cause behavioral changes in rats. Fortunately, we don't have to rely on chemicals to keep pesky and potentially dangerous mosquitoes at bay. Try some of our favorite natural mosquito control methods instead.

Some garden plants naturally repel mosquitoes. Rose-scented geraniums contain the natural insect repellents citronellal and geraniol—some gardeners report swishing their hands through

the leaves is enough to deter mosquitoes. Lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*), which is easy to grow from seed, contains the repellents citronellal, geraniol and geranial. And the essential oil in catnip (*Nepeta cataria*), nepetalactone, was found to be about 10 times more effective at repelling mosquitoes than DEET, researchers at Iowa State University found.

Gardeners also report anecdotally that crushing handfuls of basil (*Ocimum basilicum*), lemon thyme (*Thymus x citriodorus*) and lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citratus*) can repel mosquitoes for short periods—usually less than 30 minutes. To try these plants, just crush a handful of leaves in your hand and rub them on exposed skin. (Use any herb with caution until you know how your skin will react.) Another natural solution may be soybean oil. In a study by the *New England Journal of Medicine*, a soybean oil-based repellent offered protection from mosquito bites for 1.5 hours.

Plants that Repel Mosquitoes

A number of smart yard management techniques can help reduce the number of mosquitoes in an area. First, eliminate breeding places: any objects that can hold as little as a few tablespoons of water for seven to 10 days—the time it takes for eggs to hatch and larvae to mature.

Commonly overlooked breeding spots include old tires, clogged gutters and abandoned tubs or buckets. Change the water weekly in bird baths, wading pools, outdoor pet bowls or anywhere else you might find standing water around your property.

If your yard contains large water troughs, ponds or other areas with standing water, you can use Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis israelensis*), a naturally occurring bacterium that kills mosquito larvae, yet is nontoxic to people and fish. Many garden centers sell mosquito dunks or granulated products containing this fast-acting biological larvicide.

When it comes to treating your lawn, avoid spraying the area with broad-spectrum insecticides. Many of these sprays contain insecticidal compounds known as pyrethrins. Extremely toxic to bees, fish such as bluegill and lake trout, and slightly to moderately toxic to bird species, these chemicals also have been associated with (in rare cases, dangerous) allergic reactions in humans, and anemia and disruption of sex hormones in lab animals. Along with pest insects, insecticides can also kill natural mosquito predators—most of which take longer to repopulate than the mosquitoes themselves. Keeping backyard chickens also can be an effective way to reduce mosquitoes and other insect pests. Learn about how to select a breed, build your own coop and more in "What the Cluck! Raise Backyard Chickens."

Protect Yourself

A few other outdoor habits can help repel mosquitoes naturally. Fans may be a good way to help shoo the pests off your deck or patio—researchers believe fans work because they help dispel the carbon dioxide we exhale, which is how mosquitoes locate us. If you have an unscreened porch, install an overhead ceiling fan: You'll be cooler and may get fewer bites. Burning citronella candles is effective and one of the easier natural mosquito control methods. In one study, the candles were shown to reduce mosquito bites for those near them while they

were being burned—but their effectiveness is only in the immediate area if wind is low, so it's best to pair their use with a topical repellent. You will also find commercially available mosquito traps, but The American Mosquito Control Association has determined that the traps, designed to lure and kill large numbers of pests, are only effective against certain species. Placing baited traps on your property could, in fact, attract mosquitoes that may not come otherwise, and at \$200 to \$500, you will want to get a local endorsement of effectiveness before investing in such products.

You can reduce your personal attractiveness to mosquitoes by avoiding highly perfumed soaps and shampoos and wearing loose-fitting clothing, which helps form an air barrier between you and the bugs. Mosquitoes are most attracted to areas of the body where the skin is thin and blood vessels are close to the surface such as ears, wrists and ankles, so pay extra attention to covering or applying natural repellent to these areas. Opt for light- or neutral-colored clothing, which is less attractive to mosquitoes than dark or bright floral colors.

Be diligent about using your herbal mosquito repellent. Most herbal repellents work for a shorter time period than their chemical counterparts. The key to using any plant-based repellent is to watch how it's working. Immediately after application, mosquitoes will not light on your skin; as the effectiveness wanes, they will light but not bite. That's your signal to apply more repellent because the third stage is near—when the mosquitoes light and bite.

Herbal Mosquito Repellent Recipe

To avoid using DEET-based products, make your own herbal mosquito repellent. The following essential oils will naturally repel mosquitoes—for a stronger formula, try mixing several oils together. Experiment to see which oils work best with your body chemistry. Always test essential oils on a small patch of skin before applying liberally, and use extra caution with children. Most essential oils are not recommended for use on children younger than 2.

Essential Oils

- Basil
- Catnip
- Clove
- Citronella
- Eucalyptus
- Garlic
- Geranium
- Lavender
- Lemon Balm
- Myrrh
- Neem
- Palmarosa

- Peppermint
- Pine
- Rosemary

Ingredients

2 1/2 teaspoons total of any combination of mosquito-repelling essential oils

1 cup 190-proof grain alcohol (available in liquor stores)

Place ingredients in a jar with a tight-fitting lid and shake vigorously. Transfer to small bottles for storage. To use, rub a small amount on exposed skin or dab on clothing.

What Doesn't Work

Several studies have found that installing a bat house, sometimes cited as a mosquito deterrent, is ineffective at controlling mosquitoes because bats prefer to dine on larger insects. Ultrasonic devices and outdoor bug “zappers” also don't help control mosquito populations.

Read more: <http://www.motherearthliving.com/health-and-wellness/natural-mosquito-control-methods>

15 Uses for Mint

A true botanical wonder, mint is a breeze to care for, and its pleasing aroma makes it a welcome addition to the garden. The best part about this easy-to-grow herb is its usefulness. Mint makes a delicious addition to meals, a healthful tea, a fragrant potpourri and an insect-detering spray. This sweet-smelling plant also has soothing and anesthetic properties that make it a great fit for homemade body-care products. To grow mint, get a cutting from a friend or purchase a starter plant at a nursery. (Mint doesn't reproduce true from seed.) Mint can actually be too easy to grow—it sometimes takes over the garden—so give this attractive ground cover plenty of room to spread, or plant it in a container.

1. All aBuzz: Growing mint will keep your yard and garden buzzing with beneficial insects. Mint is rich in nectar and pollen, and its small flower clusters keep these sweet treats easily accessible for helpful bugs such as honeybees and hoverflies.

2. Bug Off: While it attracts “good bugs,” mint also deters “bad bugs.” Repel ants and flies by growing pennyroyal mint right outside your door, or spray diluted peppermint essential oil (10 parts water to one part oil) around doorways and windows.

3. **Flea Free:** Keep pets free of bothersome fleas with this homemade repellent: Bundle 2 parts fresh spearmint, 1 part fresh thyme and 1 part fresh wormwood, and tuck it inside a small pillow. Place the pillow near your pet's bed or another favorite resting place.
4. **Room Refresher:** Keep your home smelling fresh by adding a few drops of mint essential oil to your favorite homemade or unscented store-bought cleaner. Try this simple floor cleaning solution, good for wood, concrete or tile floors: Dilute a cup of white vinegar in a gallon of water and add 3 to 5 drops of mint essential oil.
5. **Beverage Booster:** Mint is refreshing in iced beverages. Add sprigs of fresh mint to a pitcher of water or plain iced tea, let it sit for 30 minutes or more, and serve it over ice. If you enjoy cocktails, mix fresh mint into homemade juleps or mojitos.
6. **Veggie Revamp:** Enjoy an interesting twist on a vegetable medley by adding fresh or dried chopped mint to peas, green beans, carrots or cauliflower during their last two minutes of cooking.
7. **Divine Desserts:** Mix 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh mint leaves into chocolate chip cookie dough and bake as usual for wonderfully minty treats.
8. **Breath Saver:** You don't have to rely on mint gum or candies to freshen your breath. A sprig of your favorite fresh mint variety will get rid of bad breath just as well. Simply pluck and chew.
9. **Tummy Tamer:** Peppermint tea is an excellent way to ease an upset stomach. Peppermint helps calm the digestive tract and alleviate indigestion, intestinal gas and abdominal cramping.
10. **Hiccup Help:** Try this homemade concoction to help soothe the diaphragm irritation that can cause hiccups: Pour a glass of lukewarm water, then add a couple squeezes of fresh lemon juice, a pinch of salt and a few mint leaves.
11. **Steam Clean:** A peppermint steam can help clear sinuses and congestion and fight infection. Bring a pot of water to boil, turn off the heat, add a few drops of peppermint essential oil and lean over the pot, draping a towel over your head. Breathe in the minty steam. Mint steams also act as a cleansing and stimulating facial.
12. **Nausea Nix:** Peppermint essential oil can boost your mood and reduce feelings of nausea. Simply add a couple drops to a clean handkerchief and breathe in.
13. **Headache Healer:** Apply a few drops of peppermint essential oil to your temple to relieve migraines, as compounds in peppermint oil are known to calm muscle spasms. You can also make a simple compress to get rid of tension headaches: Pour 3 cups hot water over 3 peppermint tea bags. Steep, covered for 5 to 7 minutes; remove tea bags and add ice. To use, dip wash cloth into cold tea and apply to forehead.
14. **Fresh Feet:** Mint soothes aching feet thanks to the pain-relieving properties in menthol, a compound in mint. Menthol also triggers a cooling sensation, perfect for foot scrubs. Try this

one: Combine 1 cup sea salt, 1/3 cup olive oil and 6 drops peppermint essential oil. Scrub feet and rinse.

15. Sunburn Soother: Menthol cools and refreshes the skin, making mint a handy herb to keep around in the summer. Use it to ease sunburn pain by making a strong peppermint tea and refrigerating the mixture for several hours. To use, gently apply to the burned area with cotton pads.

Read more: <http://www.motherearthliving.com>