

# HERBS & THEIR USES

The top twelve of herbs that no garden should be without.

by Belinda Allen

## SAGE

**Culinary uses:** Works well with pork, chicken & duck, sage & onion stuffing. It goes well with butternut squash & many pulses. It also works with many vegetables & cheese & potato.

**Medicinally:** It helps to prevent flatulence and aids digestion, its leaves can be made in to a tea to ease sore throats and coughs. Its antibacterial properties can be used as a gargle to help relieve mouth ulcers & sore gums.

## ROSEMARY

**Culinary uses:** Works well with lamb, chicken, turkey & oily fish. Add a few sprigs when roasting potatoes & vegetables. Goes well in tomato based dishes or added to breads such as focaccia. It also works well with cheese dishes such as macaroni or fondue. Add a few sprigs to bbq coals.

**Medicinally:** It can be used as a herbal infusion as a tonic & stimulant for the nerves and is a popular remedy for combating fatigue & depression using a few drops of essential oil in a vaporiser. It can also be applied topically for its beneficial effects to help relieve muscle cramps and arthritic joint pain. Aids memory & concentration.

Make a spray by simmering a few stems for 30 mins, strain & put in a spray bottle, use as a disinfectant spray around the home or spray it on your dog to help deter fleas!

## LAVENDER

**Culinary uses:** Not a lot, due to its strong camphor like smell, though it can be used to flavour ice creams, shortbread, jams & jellies, meringues & chocolate mousse.

**Medicinally:** The scent has long been used as a remedy to calm & sooth the nerves, improve the mood and relax the muscles. The scent is commonly used to induce sleep and relieve anxiety & depression. Apply undiluted to relieve burns & insect bites or prevent cuts from becoming infected. Added to a carrier oil and used in massage to relieve muscle tension and headaches. It is also antibacterial, antiseptic, deodorising and insect repelling, which means it can be used in every room in the house. Infuse dry or

fresh flowers in white vinegar to make an effective cleaning spray. Add a few drops of essential oil in your kitchen bin or vacuum cleaner eliminates stale odours.

## MINT

**Culinary uses:** Chopped on to peas & potatoes, mint jelly or sauce to accompany lamb. Pea & Mint soup, cucumber & mint sorbet, chopped in to yoghurt to cool a hot curry. Use in oil to drizzle on salads, greek salad with feta. It works well in summer drinks, mint Julep, mojito or added to smoothies. Add to chocolate mousse, ice cream many dessert dishes. Mint tea.

**Medicinally:** Mint is a very effective antioxidant and drinking mint tea helps to calm & sooth the digestion. Peppermint oil capsules help treat IBS and abdominal pains. Menthol in mint is a powerful decongestant it helps to break up phlegm & mucus, by breathing in hot steam with a few drops of peppermint oil. In creams & lotions it can help cool sunburnt skin and is soothing for tired aching feet.

## PARSLEY

**Culinary uses:** Goes well with fish and as a garnish in many dishes. It is a major component of Salsa verde (parsley, capers, anchovies, garlic & vinegar) and Gremolata (parsley, garlic, & lemon zest) both go very well with fish.

**Medicinally:** It is a good source of vitamin C and can be used to treat fluid retention and urinary tract infections. It calms the gut, aids digestion and encourages the appetite. Its anti-inflammatory properties help ease toothache, bruises & insect bites. Helps decrease blood sugar levels, useful in diabetic control.

## BASIL

**Culinary uses:** Obviously pesto, but also in oil drizzled over pasta dishes, salads or pizza. Goes very well with tomatoes, aubergines, peppers and chicken dishes. Flavouring oils & vinegars or herb butter. Make basil ice cream, basil & lime sorbet.

**Medicinally:** It helps relieve nervous irritability. Add a tablespoon of dried herb or a handful of fresh leaves to boiling water and breath in the steam it soothes headaches. Adding a few drops of the essential oil with a handful of epsom salts & himalayan salt crystals to your bath water relieves anxiety.

## CHIVES

**Culinary uses:** Both leaves & flowers can be used in cooking, they have a mild onion flavour if you don't want a strong taste. Use with eggs in pancakes, omelettes, scrambled or in quiche. With cheese in sandwich fillings & dips. Add towards the end of cooking.

**Medicinally:** All alliums have a preventative effect in certain cancers, including stomach, oesophageal & prostate. They also have a mild stimulant & diuretic effect and are antibacterial and antiseptic.

## THYME

**Culinary uses:** Works well with chicken & fish, roast potatoes, mushrooms & aubergine, in stocks & stews. It makes a good pairing with citrus, garlic, cream, butter, olive oil, white wine & dijon mustard to make sauces & dressings. Flavouring oils & vinegars, chopped over tomatoes in a salad. Make a detox water with thyme leaves, lemon, lime & grapefruit its delicious and hydrating, or try thyme & lime tea.

**Medicinally:** Thyme oil is an excellent alternative to conventional oral hygiene products. Making a cheap mouthwash using an infusion of the leaves or a few drops of essential oil. It is antiseptic & antibacterial and can treat tooth decay, gingivitis & bad breath. It also repels mosquitos, fleas & lice. Breathing in the steam with thyme added, helps relieve congestion in the lungs and prevents mucus build up.

## FENNEL & DILL

**Culinary uses:** Both are very similar in taste though I think dill has the edge when it comes to eating with smoked salmon & cream cheese. They go well with fish, egg & vegetables. If you are making dill pickles pick the flowering head before it turns to seed for the strongest flavour. Its warming anise & liquorice flavour goes well in sweet dishes, baking & ice creams. The fennel seeds make a lovely tea.

**Medicinally:** Both are anti-fungal, antibacterial & antioxidant. Eating dried fennel seeds is said to improve the eyesight. Drinking fennel tea soothes an upset stomach and aids digestion. You can make your own gripe water mixing seeds, sugar syrup & sodium bicarbonate in water to help infants with colic.

## CORIANDER

Culinary uses: As with basil, coriander can be made into a pesto to go with pasta or as a topping on fish. Chopped in to salads, soups, stews & curries. It is excellent with ginger, garlic & chilli added to stir fry or with rice. The crushed seeds smell orangey added to carrot soup with some chopped leaves tastes lovely.

Medicinally: Eating coriander is said to lower cholesterol levels in the blood. It is also helpful for treating diarrhoea, prevents nausea, vomiting & stomach disorders.

Oil of coriander helps keep mouth ulcers from worsening. It also helps people who suffer with anaemia and can reduce the effects of hay fever and allergic reactions.

## OREGANO

Culinary uses: It works well in all mediterranean style dishes, including pasta sauces, tomato & aubergine, pizza toppings & soups like minestrone. Add to beans lentils & pulses to help with digestion. Chopped in to an omelette or scrambled eggs and topped on to vegetables, fish, meat & poultry before roasting.

Medicinally: Oregano is full of fibre just 1 tablespoon gives 10% of your daily needs. It is also rich in antioxidants is antiviral, antibacterial & anti fungal. The oil must be diluted in a carrier oil prior to applying to the skin, then it can be applied to the temples, neck & forehead to ease headaches & migraines. It also helps with insomnia, can cure athlete's foot and inhaling the oil via a vaporiser can help with seasonal allergies and boost the immune system.

## EXTRAS:

Garlic, Ginger & Turmeric are all extremely beneficial in the diet, turmeric is used in Chinese & Ayurvedic medicine to treat a wide range of diseases. It has been shown to lower cholesterol, has a protective effect on the liver. It reduces symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis, reduces pain in post op inflammation and has proved effective in treating stomach ulcers and bowel diseases such as Crohn's. You can now buy capsules from the health food shop, add it to a smoothie or make a tea with ginger & honey, add black pepper as this helps assimilate it. Ginger is valuable in treating motion sickness & nausea. It helps to protect the heart & blood vessels by preventing the formation of blood clots. Garlic is a natural antibiotic and helps fight infections and purifies the bloodstream, if you incorporate these 3 in to your diet I am convinced that you will spend much less time visiting the pharmacist, plus they taste good and cost so little. ENJOY