

Some Useful Herbs

NAME: Common Agrimony (*Agrimonia eupatoria*)

DESCRIPTION: A perennial plant to 80cm tall, it has narrow, pointed, deeply serrated leaves. Slender spikes of yellow flowers are borne in summer and are followed by burr-like seed capsules. The flowers and foliage have a slightly apricot smell.

ORIGIN: Europe and the Near East

USES: Agrimony is a traditional medicine with astringent and antibacterial qualities. It was often used to treat battle wounds and to treat urinary tract infections and a range of other ailments. The flowers are still harvested today and are used mainly to treat sore throats, acne and diarrhoea. The whole plant, including the root, can be used as a source of a yellow dye.

NAME: Caraway (*Carum carvi*)

DESCRIPTION: Caraway is a biennial plant to less than 1m tall with fine feathery leaves and umbels of white flowers like flattened parasols. The flowers are followed by the curved, ridged seeds which are the most popular part of the plant. The long white roots and the leaves can also be eaten.

ORIGIN: Europe and parts of Western Asia

USES: Caraway has been used both medicinally and in cuisine for thousands of years. It is perhaps best known for its use in caraway seed cake, popular in Britain. Caraway is useful as an aid to digestion and to relieve flatulence.

NAME: Chamomile – Roman chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*)

DESCRIPTION: Roman (or English) chamomile is a perennial herb with fine narrow leaves and white daisy flowers with yellow centres. It grows to around 30cm tall and spreads via runners to form a dense mat. The word chamomile comes from the Greek *khamaimelon* meaning earth-apple and both species are highly aromatic with an apple perfume.

ORIGIN: Roman chamomile is endemic to a wide area in Europe, Asia & North Africa.

USES: Chamomile has been highly valued for its many beneficial properties since ancient times and it is still used medicinally today. It has anti-inflammatory, antiseptic and sedative qualities and German chamomile has analgesic and anti-spasmodic properties as well. Chamomile tea has long been used as a calming drink and is recommended for those suffering from anxiety and irritable bowel syndrome.

NAME: Comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*)

DESCRIPTION: Comfrey is a clump-forming perennial to 1.2 m tall, with large, matt, hairy leaves on strong stems. It is a member of the Borage family. The rhizome sends up tall stalks bearing small clusters of tubular flowers in shades ranging from purple to pale yellow and white.

ORIGIN: Europe and Western Asia

USES: It has traditionally been used as a poultice for sprains, bruises and wounds, and was also believed to speed the healing of broken bones; a common name for it is 'knightbone'. Poultices are made from the allantoin-rich, roots of the plant, although the dried rhizome and roots, mixed with water, can be used. The poultice should not be applied to broken skin. Comfrey must not be taken internally as it can cause liver damage.

NAME: Elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*)

DESCRIPTION: A deciduous tree or many-suckered shrub to 4m with attractive, serrated, pinnate leaves and heads of lacy, cream flowers in summer/early autumn. The flowers are followed by shiny, purple-black berries.

ORIGIN: Europe

USES: The flowers are used to add flavour to jams and jellies and in desserts. The berries are also used in jams and jellies and to make elderberry wine. An infusion of the flowers makes a tea that was used to treat colds and flu. The infusion was also used to soothe sore eyes and for cosmetic purposes. The leaves and berries are used in various medicines and ointments.

NAME: Feverfew (*Chrysanthemum parthenium*)

DESCRIPTION: A small perennial shrub, feverfew grows to around 80cm tall. It has green, much divided leaves (though a golden-leaved form does exist.) Flowers are small with yellow centres.

ORIGIN: South-eastern Europe

USES: Feverfew is an old medicinal plant as its common name indicates. In particular, it is used to treat fevers, arthritis, migraines and menstruation problems. In her book "Grow Your Own Herbal Remedies", Penny Woodward warns that feverfew should not be taken by folk on blood-thinning medication or by pregnant women and that eating too many fresh leaves can cause mouth ulcers.

NAME: Garlic (*Allium sativum*)

DESCRIPTION: Garlic is a perennial bulbous plant. It forms a compound bulb made up of many individual cloves or small bulbs. Each one of these is capable of growing into a new plant and producing another compound bulb. The flattened, linear leaves are also tasty, but harvesting the leaves will result in smaller clusters of bulbs being produced. Some varieties produce flower stems with clusters of pale pink flowers surrounded by papery bracts. These may produce bulbils which can be planted out. They will take two years to form full compound bulbs.

ORIGIN: Siberia. (There is some argument over this. The plant has also been known in the Mediterranean since Ancient Egyptian times.)

USES: Apart from its wonderful flavour, many people strongly believe that consuming garlic is a useful disease preventative, and recent medical research appears to support this.

NAME: Lavender (English) *Lavandula angustifolia*

DESCRIPTION: English Lavender grows to around 80 cm tall and has silvery grey-green, smooth leaves and lavender/mauve flower spikes borne on very tall slender stems. White, pink, deep purple and violet-blue forms and cultivars are available.

ORIGIN: Mediterranean

USES: English Lavender is used for a wide range of scented products. Lavender oil is soporific. Lavender oil is often used in products that aim to relieve the pain of arthritis and rheumatism. The oil is also an antiseptic. Rubbing your skin with a few lavender flowers and leaves makes a quick and pleasant personal insect repellent.

NAME: Lovage – *Levisicum officinale*

DESCRIPTION: This perennial herb can grow up to 1.5m tall. It looks rather like a slender celery plant. All parts of the plant - stems, leaves, roots and seeds are used. The plant is aromatic and it has a savoury, peppery, celery-like flavour. Small bright yellow flowers are borne in summer. The seeds are elongated and brown.

ORIGIN: The Mediterranean

USES: Dried leaves make a savoury tea that is reputed to aid digestion. The herb was a favourite of the Ancient Romans who used it as a medicinal cure-all for a range of ailments from stomach upsets and infections to gynaecological problems. An infusion added to a bath was considered an effective deodorant.

Name: Mustard (Black) *Brassica nigra*

Description: Black Mustard is an annual herb that can grow up to 2m tall. The lower leaves are large and hairy and the younger leaves are softer and smoother. Bright yellow four-petalled flowers are borne in summer and are followed by pods which contain the dark reddish brown or black mustard seeds.

Origin: Europe, North Africa and Asia

Uses: The seed has long been used for medicinal purposes. Mustard plasters and poultices were used in different cultures for the relief of inflammation and chest complaints, but this was not without its risks as the mustard oil that the plant contains is highly volatile and can easily cause skin to blister.



NAME: Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*)

ORIGIN: Europe

DESCRIPTION: Rosette forming perennial plant to 10cm with bright green bubbled leaves. The species bears sweetly perfumed yellow flowers that sit amongst the foliage. (Many other colour forms now exist) Flowering occurs in winter and early spring.

USES: Primrose flowers are edible and make a colourful addition to salads and sweets. Traditionally, primrose flower tea was used to treat the symptoms of colds and also to calm the nerves. It was also used topically to treat minor skin afflictions including sunburn.



NAME : Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*). *R. prostratus* is the prostrate species.

DESCRIPTION: Rosemary is a stiff, erect bush with dark green, spiky, narrow leaves with silver under-sides. It grows to about 1.5m. The prostrate form has smaller leaves and grows as a trailing ground cover rarely exceeding 30 cm high. The flowers of both species are blue, though white-flowering varieties exist. A Christian legend has it that during the flight to Egypt, Mary threw her cloak over a rosemary bush when she stopped to rest, and the flowers which had previously always been white, turned to blue.

ORIGIN: Mediterranean countries

USES: An infusion of the leaves has always been popular as a hair rinse.

NAME: Sage (*Salvia officinalis*)

DESCRIPTION: Sage is a very attractive perennial herb with large grey green leaves with an interesting texture. It grows to about 80cm tall. Purple flowers are borne usually in autumn and are attractive to bees.

ORIGIN: The Mediterranean

USES: The plant has a long history of both cosmetic and medicinal use. Both the Ancient Egyptians and the Chinese believed it improved brain function. It has antiseptic properties.

NAME: Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*)

DESCRIPTION: A robust perennial with pretty, fern-like leaves and yellow button flowers in late summer and autumn. It grows to about 1m and has a spreading root system which may become invasive. It dies off in winter and sends up new shoots in spring.

ORIGIN: Europe

USES: Tansy is not a culinary herb as it has a very bitter taste. It is best used as an insect repellent. Use dried tansy in bags and pomanders to repel moths in clothes cupboards.

NAME: Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*)

DESCRIPTION: Valerian is a perennial herb growing up to 1.5m tall. The indented leaves are carried in pairs along the stem. The flowers are pale pink and borne as flattened heads in summer. The root is the part used and it has a strong smell and a fairly unpleasant taste, but is valued for its soothing properties.

ORIGIN: Europe and parts of Asia

USES: Valerian root has traditionally been used as a sedative and it is an ingredient in many medicines used for this purpose. Fresh or dried valerian root can be used to make a calming tea, though most people find that it is necessary to add honey or other herbs to off-set the taste. The tea may be useful to treat insomnia, cramps and stress, but do not use for extended periods without a break, or if you are taking other sleep-inducing medications. Ground valerian root can also be used to make a soothing bath. The leaves are a very useful addition to compost and valerian is often used as a companion plant, especially in the vegetable garden.

This is a small sample from an extensive list about herbs found at: www.global-garden.com.au