

LEMON BALM





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Introduction

Lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*) is a versatile and accessible herb cherished by many for its lemony aroma! The plant has a long history of use in herbal medicine for soothing the mind, promoting digestion, and supporting overall health. Its uses date back thousands of years and continue to be studied in modern times. In this e-booklet, we will delve into the cultivation, uses, and preparations of lemon balm!

NOTE: Lemon balm is considered safe for most people. Start with small amounts when trying it for the first time!



Identification and Harvesting

Lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*), a perennial herb in the mint family (Lamiaceae), is much beloved for its fragrant, lemon-scented leaves and its ease of cultivation. The genus name *Melissa* comes from the Greek word for “honeybee,” reflecting its early use in attracting bees. It thrives in moist, partly shady areas but is also capable of growing in full sun, making it a versatile plant for gardens. Lemon balm is well-suited for container gardening and can spread quickly when planted directly in the ground.



When it comes to harvesting, the best practice is to cut the plant at the leaf axils just before flowering to ensure optimal flavor and potency. This timing prevents the leaves from losing their essential oils (volatile organic compounds) and allows for multiple harvests during the growing season. To dry the leaves, place them in a well-ventilated area (a drying rack works best) that is shaded to preserve the aroma and medicinal properties.



Herb Drying Rack



Lemon Balm: Historical Uses

Lemon balm has been valued for centuries across cultures. Its applications reflect both practical use and spiritual symbolism.

Ancient Greece and Rome

- Greek physician Dioscorides prescribed lemon balm for healing wounds and treating venomous insect bites.
- Roman naturalists believed it could “revitalize” the spirit and strengthen the heart.
- Lemon balm was cultivated in temple gardens as an herb sacred to the goddess Diana, used for its ability to attract bees and its association with “vitality.”

Islamic Medicine

- The renowned Persian physician Avicenna wrote about lemon balm in his medical texts, recommending it for uplifting the spirit and easing melancholy.
- It was commonly infused into teas to treat sadness, palpitations, and nervous tension.

European Folk Medicine

- Lemon balm became an essential ingredient in medieval monastic medicine. Monks in Benedictine monasteries often grew it in herb gardens to prepare healing salves and teas.
- It was a key component of Carmelite Water, a 14th-century herbal tonic used for headaches, indigestion, and stress.
- Paracelsus, a 16th-century physician, referred to lemon balm as the “elixir of life,” believing it could extend longevity.
- In Eastern Europe, lemon balm was brewed into teas or applied as poultices for anxiety, colic, and fevers.
- In England, lemon balm was widely cultivated during the Tudor period for making flavored wines and cordials.

Lemon Balm: A Gentle Plant Ally



Nervous System Support

Due to its gentle calming effects on the nervous system, lemon balm is often labeled a “nourishing nervine” or “relaxing nervine.” This means it is effective in reducing stress, nervous tension, and anxiety, helping to create a sense of calm. For those struggling with insomnia, lemon balm serves as a gentle sedative, especially when combined with other relaxing herbs like chamomile or catnip, for promoting restful sleep.



Cognitive Support



Beyond its effects on the nervous system, lemon balm also promotes cognitive health and memory. Research has found that lemon balm extract can reduce agitation (restlessness) and improve the quality of life for those suffering with dementia, including those with Alzheimer’s disease. All can benefit from its cognitive support, as studies have demonstrated improvements in attention, accuracy, and calmness when using lemon balm.

Digestive Support

Lemon balm is equally beneficial for digestive health. It supports healthy digestion by soothing common issues such as cramping, indigestion, and gas. Its aromatic and carminative (relieving gas and bloating) properties make it an excellent choice for a relaxing after-dinner tea, easing discomfort and promoting healthy digestion.



Immune Support

When it comes to immune system support, lemon balm shines with its antiviral properties! Studies have shown that lemon balm cream can help heal cold sores and alleviate symptoms of herpes simplex virus.

Cardiovascular Support

Lastly, lemon balm has notable benefits for heart health. It helps reduce heart palpitations and tension by modulating inflammation, making it a comforting choice for those prone to stress-related cardiovascular symptoms. Moreover, a clinical trial has found that lemon balm improves lipid profiles and reduces inflammation in patients with type 2 diabetes.







Culinary Uses

- Fresh leaves can be infused into honey or vinegar to take alone or add to beverages or food.
- Makes refreshing herbal popsicles or cooling infused water.
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Topical Applications

- **Insect Bites and Stings:** Fresh lemon balm leaves can be applied to bug bites for pain relief and reduced swelling.
 - **Cold Sores:** Lemon balm cream or salve can help heal cold sores and alleviate symptoms of herpes simplex virus.
 - **Skin Protection:** Using a topical cream with lemon balm can help protect against UV-induced skin damage and reduce oxidative stress from radiation exposure.
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Simple Recipes

Lemon balm is incredibly versatile when brewed as tea, used as a tincture, or infused into an oil.

Cognitive Support Tea

Ingredients:

- 1 tbsp dried lemon balm
- 1 tbsp dried tulsi (substitute peppermint)
- 1 tsp dried sage
- 1 tsp dried rosemary

1. Steep in 12 oz of hot water for 10 minutes.
2. Strain.
3. Add sweetener (optional) and enjoy!



Digestive After-Meal Tea

Ingredients:

- 1 tbsp dried lemon balm
- 1 tbsp dried basil
- 1 tsp dried fennel
- 1 tsp dried peppermint

1. Steep in 16 oz of hot water for 5–10 minutes.
2. Strain.
3. Add sweetener (optional) and enjoy!



Fresh Lemon Balm Tincture

1. Finely chop 2 cups of fresh lemon balm leaves.
2. Pack the leaves into a 16 oz (one pint) mason jar.
3. Cover the leaves to the very top with 100 proof (50% alcohol) vodka. (You can substitute 80 proof (40% alcohol) but let it sit for 6–8 weeks before straining.)
4. Seal and let sit for 4–6 weeks in a cool, dark place, then strain.
5. Bottle, label, and store in a cool, dark place.



Simple Cooling Fresh Infusion

1. Add fresh lemon balm to room-temperature water.
2. Let it sit for at least 60 minutes or overnight. Refrigerate if in a hot climate.
3. Enjoy as a refreshing, calming, and cooling beverage or turn into refreshing popsicles!

Simple Fresh Oil Infusion

1. Add fresh lemon balm to oil (olive, sunflower & avocado oils are best)
2. Warm at low/mid heat for 10 mins. to infuse.
3. Strain and bottle. Let sit for 24 hours to allow excess water to settle at the bottom.
4. Ladle out the oil and re-bottle, leaving out the water to prevent spoilage.





Conclusion

Lemon balm is a powerful herb with a wide range of uses, from calming the mind and supporting memory, to easing digestion and boosting the immune system. Whether enjoyed as a tea, tincture, or topical cream, its benefits are as diverse as they are profound!