

PEPPERMINT





Table of Contents

Peppermint: The Refreshing Ally	1
Key Plant Constituents	1
A Brief History of Peppermint	3
Identification, Cultivation & Preservation	3
Side Effects and Precautions	6
Peppermint Essential Oil: Benefits and Warnings	7
Peppermint: Uses and Preparations	8
Conclusion: A Versatile Herb for All Seasons	19

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Peppermint: The Refreshing Ally

In this e-booklet, we're diving into the world of peppermint (*Mentha × piperita*) — an accessible herb that has been cherished for centuries. From easing digestion to sharpening mental focus, peppermint is a powerhouse plant that can uplift and relax us at the same time. So, let's explore the fascinating history, science, and practical benefits of peppermint, and how we can incorporate this versatile herb into our daily lives!



What Makes Peppermint So Special?

Peppermint's incredible properties come from its essential oils, particularly menthol. This compound is responsible for its cooling sensation, soothing aroma, and health benefits. In addition to menthol, peppermint contains menthone, flavonoids, tannins, and antioxidants, all of which contribute to its therapeutic effects.

Peppermint is a hybrid mint, a cross between watermint and spearmint. Unlike other calming mints like spearmint, peppermint has a paradoxical quality: it cools and relaxes while also stimulating and energizing. This makes it both invigorating and soothing—a perfect balance!

Key Plant Constituents

Peppermint has a rich array of plant constituents:

- 1. Menthol:** The star of peppermint, responsible for its cooling sensation and soothing properties.
- 2. Menthone:** A secondary compound with calming and digestive benefits.

3. Flavonoids: Powerful antioxidants that protect the body from oxidative stress.

4. Tannins: Known for their astringent properties, which tighten tissues and support skin and mucosal health.

5. Rosmarinic Acid: An anti-inflammatory compound that supports respiratory and immune health.

6. Essential Oils: Include limonene, cineole, and pulegone, which offer antimicrobial, antifungal, and antiviral properties.

7. Acetic Acid and Gums: Aid in digestion and contribute to peppermint's soothing effects on the gut.

These constituents work together to give peppermint its unique ability to cool and invigorate, relax and stimulate—all at the same time!



A Brief History of Peppermint

Peppermint has a long and fascinating history in folk medicine, cherished by cultures around the world for its versatility and refreshing qualities. Ancient Egyptians included peppermint in their remedies, and it was found in their tombs as early as 1,000 BCE. In traditional European herbalism, peppermint became a popular choice for soothing digestive woes like bloating, gas, and colic. Nicholas Culpeper, a renowned 17th-century English herbalist, highlighted its cooling properties, using it to calm fevers, dispel “wind” (gas,) and relieve headaches.

In Chinese and Ayurvedic medicine, peppermint was revered for its ability to balance the body and bring relief to tense muscles and minor skin irritations. Native American communities turned to wild mint for its calming and healing effects, particularly for respiratory health and congestion.

Over the centuries, peppermint has also been a favorite for oral care, with its natural antimicrobial properties, making it a trusted breath freshener. During the colder months, it found its way into herbal blends to clear sinuses, ease coughs, and bring comfort during colds and flu.

Peppermint: Identification, Cultivation, and Preservation

Identification

Peppermint is classified in the Lamiaceae family of plants. Plants in this family, also known as the “Mint” family, are aromatic, versatile herbs and shrubs that are easily recognizable by their square-shaped stems, opposite leaves, and fragrant foliage. Many members, like basil, mint, rosemary, and lavender, are culinary staples.

- **Leaves:** Peppermint leaves are dark green with purple-tinged stems. They’re slightly serrated, oval-shaped, and emit a strong minty aroma when crushed.



- **Flowers:** The plant produces small, lavender-colored flowers in clusters on tall, slender spikes during summer.
- **Growth Habit:** Peppermint typically grows 1 to 3 feet tall and spreads quickly via underground runners.
- **Scent:** The easiest identifier is the distinct, cool, and invigorating scent of its leaves—a hallmark of peppermint.



Cultivation

Growing peppermint is a breeze, even for beginners! Here's how to do it:

1. **Choose the Right Location:** Peppermint thrives in moist, well-drained soil with partial shade to full sun. Be cautious—it's an aggressive grower and can quickly take over your garden if not contained!
2. **Start with Cuttings or Plants:** While you can grow peppermint from seeds, it's easier to start with cuttings or nursery plants. Peppermint cuttings root quickly in water or directly in soil.
3. **Planting:**
 - o If planting in the ground, consider using barriers or planting in containers to control its spread.
 - o Space plants about 18–24 inches apart.
 - o Water immediately after planting to help them establish roots.



4. Care Tips:

- o **Watering:** Keep the soil consistently moist but not waterlogged.
- o **Pruning:** Regularly pinch off leaves to encourage bushier growth and prevent flowering (which can reduce leaf flavor).
- o **Pests and Diseases:** Peppermint is hardy but can occasionally face aphids, spider mites, or fungal diseases. Inspect plants regularly and address issues promptly. Neem oil is a great natural pesticide!



5. Harvesting:

- o Harvest leaves as needed by pinching them off.
- o For the best flavor, harvest in the morning before the sun gets too hot.
- o If harvesting in bulk, do so just before the plant flowers for maximum volatile oil content.

Preservation

To enjoy peppermint year-round, proper preservation is key. Here's how:

1. Drying:

- o Bundle harvested stems together and hang them upside-down in a cool, dark, and well-ventilated space.
- o Once dry, strip the leaves from the stems and store them in an airtight container away from light and heat.

2. Freezing:

- o Wash and pat leaves dry.
- o Place them in an airtight container or freeze them in ice cube trays with water for easy portioning.

3. Storing Fresh:

- o Keep fresh leaves in a damp paper towel inside a resealable bag in the refrigerator. Use within a week for the best quality.

NOTE: Another way to preserve peppermint is to make extracts and oils (detailed later in this e-booklet.)



Peppermint: Side Effects and Precautions

While peppermint is generally safe for most people, it's important to be aware of potential side effects:

- Heartburn: Peppermint tea can relax the esophageal sphincter, which can lead to heartburn in some individuals.
- Allergic Reactions: Some people may be allergic to peppermint.
- Pregnancy and Breastfeeding: Consult a healthcare professional before consuming peppermint if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.

Peppermint Essential Oil: Benefits and Warnings

Peppermint essential oil is available at most grocery stores and pharmacies. Essential oils are a distillation of the volatile organic compounds (VOC) of a plant. These volatile oils are the plant's natural defense mechanism against predators – as a means of “self preservation.” This is why peppermint essential oil makes a good bug repellent and is effective against ants, spiders, and mosquitoes! Here's what you need to know before using peppermint essential oil:

1. Dilution is Key: Peppermint essential oil is highly concentrated and should always be diluted with a carrier oil before applying to the skin to avoid irritation. A good dilution is 1-3% in the carrier oil of choice (olive, avocado, coconut, etc...)

2. Avoid Sensitive Areas: Never apply peppermint essential oil near the eyes, inner ears, or mucous membranes.

3. Allergic Reactions: Perform a patch test before use to ensure you don't have an adverse reaction.



4. Not for Infants or Pets: Peppermint essential oil can be too strong for young children, babies, and certain pets like cats and dogs.

5. Consult Before Internal Use: While peppermint essential oil is used in some edible products, ingesting any essential oil directly is not recommended without consulting a healthcare professional due to sensitization issues.



Peppermint: Uses and Preparations

1. Digestive Aid

Peppermint is a champion for digestive health. Its menthol content helps relax the muscles of the gastrointestinal tract, reducing cramping and bloating. Folk remedies often call for a cup of peppermint tea after meals to ease gas and aid digestion. Fun Fact: Peppermint has even been used historically to calm colic in infants and relieve wind colic in adults!

NOTE: Enteric-coated peppermint oil gel capsules are available for those who don't like the taste of peppermint but want its benefits for the gastrointestinal tract (particularly those with IBS.)

Fresh Peppermint Tincture

A tincture is a concentrated herbal extract made by soaking herbs in alcohol (usually vodka.) This process allows the beneficial compounds of the herb to be extracted into the alcohol, creating a potent liquid form of the plant's medicinal properties. Tinctures are typically prized for their ease of use, portability, shelf stability, and potency in small doses. This tincture recipe uses an approximate 1:2 ratio (herbs to alcohol) to ensure a concentrated extract.



What You'll Need:

- fresh peppermint leaves, crushed and finely chopped or torn (roughly 2 cups)
- vodka (at least 80 proof)
- a clean pint glass jar with a lid
- dark glass dropper bottles (for storage, optional)



Steps:

- 1. Prepare the Leaves:** Rinse the fresh peppermint leaves and gently pat them dry. Lightly crush or tear the leaves to release their aromatic oils and beneficial compounds.
- 2. Combine Ingredients:** Add the leaves to your glass jar, then pour in the vodka all the way up to the top of the jar. Ensure the leaves are completely submerged to prevent spoilage. Seal the jar tightly.
- 3. Infuse:** Store the jar in a cool, dark place for 4–6 weeks. Shake it gently every few days to encourage the extraction of peppermint's compounds.
- 4. Strain and Store:** After 4–6 weeks, strain the tincture through a fine-mesh sieve or cheesecloth to remove the leaves. Pour the tincture into dark dropper bottles and/or another clean glass jar for long-term storage.

How to Use for GI Benefits: Take a few drops directly (down the hatch!) or in a small glass of water or tea after meals to help alleviate bloating, gas, or mild digestive discomfort.



Peppermint Nausea Tincture Blend

This tincture blends peppermint with ginger and fennel (or chamomile) to help with nausea, gas, and bloating. This recipe makes approx. 1 cup (8 oz.) of tincture.



What You'll Need:

- ½ cup fresh, finely chopped peppermint leaves (or ¼ cup dried)
- 2 tablespoons dried ginger
- 1 tablespoon dried fennel (or chamomile)
- vodka (at least 80 proof)
- a clean 8 oz. glass jar with a lid
- dark glass dropper bottles (for storage, optional)

Steps:

1. Combine Ingredients: Crush the fennel. Put peppermint, ginger, and fennel (or chamomile) in the glass jar. Pour the vodka all the way up to the top of the jar. If you only have a glass jar larger than 1 cup (8 oz.) then pour the vodka to a half inch above the herbs. Ensure the ingredients are completely submerged to prevent spoilage. Seal the jar tightly.

2. Infuse: Store the jar in a cool, dark place for 4–6 weeks. Shake it gently every few days to encourage the extraction of the medicinal compounds.

3. Strain and Store: After 4–6 weeks, strain the tincture through a fine-mesh sieve or cheesecloth to remove the herbs. Pour the tincture into dark dropper bottles and/or another clean glass jar for long-term storage.



How to Use for GI Benefits: Take a few drops directly (down the hatch!) or in a small glass of water or tea to help alleviate nausea, bloating, gas, or mild digestive discomfort.

2. Mental Clarity and Focus

Feeling groggy or unfocused? Peppermint's refreshing scent can wake you up and sharpen your mind. One of the key perks of peppermint is its ability to sharpen your focus. The invigorating aroma of peppermint can stimulate the brain, improving concentration and alertness. Studies have shown that inhaling peppermint aroma or even sipping on peppermint tea can help boost cognitive performance, making it a fantastic natural pick-me-up when you're tackling a big project or need to power through a long day.

Students often use it to boost cognitive function and memory. Simply rub a fresh peppermint leaf between your fingers, inhale deeply, and feel the mental fog lift!

Quick Tip: Add a drop of peppermint essential oil to a cotton ball and keep it nearby when studying or working for a refreshing pick-me-up!



Aromatic Focus Tea

This simple tea blend can be made with spices from your kitchen. It combines peppermint with rosemary and sage, both classically used for mental clarity and boosting cerebral circulation. This recipe makes one cup (8 oz.) of tea.

What You'll Need:

- 2 teaspoons peppermint (or one tea bag)
- 1 teaspoon rosemary
- ½ teaspoon sage



Steps:

1. Combine ingredients and add to your mug of choice.
2. Pour boiling water and allow to steep for 5–10 minutes. While steeping, enjoy a quick aromatherapy “pick me up” by inhaling the steam.
3. Enjoy!

3. Relief for Tension and Muscle Pain

Peppermint's cooling properties (mainly from the menthol) make it a great remedy for tension headaches and sore muscles. This recipe makes 1 cup (8 oz.) of infused oil.



Fresh Peppermint-infused Oil

This simple oil only takes minutes to make and uses only two ingredients.

What You'll Need:

- 1/4 cup fresh peppermint leaves, finely chopped
- 1 cup carrier oil of choice (olive, avocado, grapeseed, etc...)
- small saucepan
- cheesecloth or fine sieve (strainer)
- glass jar

Steps:

1. Combine the chopped peppermint and oil in a small saucepan. Warm over low heat for 15 minutes (do not let it boil).
2. Strain the oil through cheesecloth or a fine sieve into a clean jar.
3. After a day you'll notice a small amount of water on the bottom of the jar. Syphon off the oil and transfer it to another jar, discard the remaining water in the original jar.
4. Store in a cool, dark place for up to one month.

How to Use: Massage onto your temples for headaches or onto sore muscles for a cooling sensation.

Homemade “Icy Hot” Infused Oil



Combining peppermint (menthol) with cayenne (capsaicin) is a popular blend for topical pain relief. This recipe uses an 80/20 ratio of peppermint to cayenne infused oil to create a cooling and warming blend for temporary topical pain relief. This recipe makes 1 cup (8 oz.) of the infused oil blend.

Step #1 Make the fresh infused peppermint oil using the previous recipe.

Step #2 Make an infused cayenne oil. Here’s a fast and easy recipe:

Quick Cayenne-Infused Oil

This versatile oil is perfect for topical pain relief. Capsaicin in cayenne stimulates circulation and reduces inflammation, making it excellent for soothing aches and pains naturally. This recipe uses no heat and can be made in minutes!

What You’ll Need:

- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper powder (adjust to your preferred heat level)
- 1 cup carrier oil (olive oil, coconut oil, or sweet almond oil)
- small saucepan
- glass jar



Instructions:

1. Warm the carrier oil on the stove and transfer into a clean, dry glass jar.
2. Add cayenne powder (start with ¼ teaspoon and increase, if necessary)
3. Stir well to mix.
4. Seal the jar and store the infused oil in a clean glass jar or bottle.

Step #3 Combine the two infused oils in an 8 oz. bottle.

- 3 tablespoons cayenne infused oil
- fill the remainder of the bottle with fresh peppermint infused oil

How to Use: Massage onto sore muscles for a cooling and warming sensation. Make sure to wash your hands after!



Peppermint Compound Liniment

An herbal liniment is a topical preparation of liquid (usually alcohol) and oil. The alcohol absorbs quickly causing “fast-acting” relief, while the viscosity of the oil causes slower absorption and creates a “longer-acting” relief. This compound liniment recipe combines peppermint tincture with infused oil.

Optional Substitution #1: You can substitute cayenne infused oil for the peppermint infused oil to add the “hot” to this “icy” topical spray!

Optional Substitution #2: For this recipe, you can use peppermint tincture or make a topical-only tincture with rubbing (isopropyl) alcohol. Use the same instructions as the peppermint tincture but substitute rubbing alcohol for the ethanol (vodka.) Make sure to label the jar **“FOR EXTERNAL USE ONLY”** to avoid accidental ingestion!

To create this compound liniment, combine the following in a 2 oz spray bottle:

2 teaspoons peppermint infused oil

Fill the remainder of the bottle with peppermint tincture

Optional addition: Add 5 drops of peppermint essential oil for an extra cooling effect!

How to Use: Shake the bottle to combine oil and alcohol. Spray on affected area and rub in well. Wash your hands!

Peppermint Epsom Salt Soak

This bath can help cool you down and soothe sore, achy muscles. Simply add a strong peppermint infusion (tea) and Epsom salt to your bath (or foot bath) and soak!

For a strong infusion, add 3 tablespoons of dried peppermint (or 4 tea bags) to a quart jar and steep for 10 minutes. Add ½ cup Epsom salt to help relax tense, sore muscles. Now add the infusion and Epsom salt to your bath (or foot bath.) You get the added benefit of an aromatic steam inhalation while in the tub or soaking your feet in your foot bath!



4. Respiratory and Lymphatic Support

Peppermint's menthol opens the airways and soothes respiratory issues. It's also a natural decongestant, making it a go-to remedy for colds, sinus congestion, and seasonal allergies. Additionally, peppermint supports the lymphatic system, helping to move toxins out of the body.



Herbal Steam for Congestion

- Add a handful of peppermint leaves (or a few drops of essential oil) to a bowl of steaming water.
- Place a towel over your head, lean over the bowl, and inhale deeply for 5–10 minutes.

Peppermint Spice Cabinet Allergy Tea

Here's a super simple and soothing allergy tea recipe featuring peppermint and a few common spices you probably already have in your kitchen. It's refreshing, comforting, and can help ease allergy symptoms like nasal congestion or scratchy throats. Let's brew it up!

What You'll Need:

- 1 teaspoon dried peppermint leaves (or a peppermint tea bag)
- ½ teaspoon ground turmeric
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon honey (optional)
- 1½ cups boiling water



Steps:

1. In a mug or teapot, combine the peppermint leaves (or tea bag), turmeric, and cinnamon.
2. Pour 1½ cups of boiling water over the mix.
3. Let it steep for 5–7 minutes to release all those wonderful flavors and benefits.
4. Strain if you used loose peppermint leaves and spices.
5. Stir in honey if you want a touch of sweetness and throat soothing. Sip and enjoy!

Optional additions: This tea is super customizable—if you want extra zing, add a squeeze of lemon or a dash of ginger to help with congestion.



5. Cooling Relief for Fevers and Headaches

Peppermint's cooling properties make it ideal for soothing fevers and tension headaches. In traditional medicine, peppermint was often used with elderflower and yarrow (equal parts) to promote sweating and reduce fever during colds and flu.

Spice Cabinet Peppermint Cold and Flu Tea

This tea is like a superhero in a mug! Packed with immune-boosting, antimicrobial, and respiratory-supporting herbs and spices, it's perfect for tackling colds, flu, or any lingering congestion. It's warming and cooling at the same time, aromatic, and just the comforting remedy you need when you're under the weather. When all you have is your cabinet of spices, you can make a wonderful home remedy!

What You'll Need (for 1 quart):

- 1 tablespoon dried peppermint (or two tea bags)
- 2 teaspoons dried thyme
- 1 teaspoon dried rosemary
- 1 teaspoon dried sage
- 1/2 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1/2 teaspoon dried ginger
- 1/2 teaspoon turmeric powder
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- A pinch of black pepper
- 4 cups water
- Honey or lemon (optional, for added soothing benefits and flavor)
- 1 quart glass jar



Instructions:

1. Add all the herbs and spices to your quart jar.
2. Pour hot water over the herbs, cover the jar, and allow the herbs to seep for 10–15 minutes to extract the medicinal properties.
3. Strain the tea, discarding the herbs and spices.
4. Sweeten with honey or add a squeeze of lemon, if desired.

How to Use It:

Sip this tea throughout the day, especially when dealing with respiratory symptoms like congestion, coughs, or sore throats. It's also perfect as a preventative during flu season to give your immune system a head start!

Cooling Peppermint Compress

An herbal compress is a simple, quick, and effective topical application. First, you make a strong infusion (tea) of an herb (2 tea bags per cup.) Then, you dip a cloth in the infusion, wring it out, and apply it to the affected area. For fevers, apply the compress to your forehead or the back of the neck. For tension headaches, apply to your temples.

Quick Tip: You can freeze peppermint infusion in ice cube trays and then store the frozen cubes in the freezer for later use!



Simple Peppermint Cooling Bath

This bath can help cool you down and soothe “hot,” achy muscles. Simply add a strong peppermint infusion (tea) to your bath and soak!

For a strong infusion, add 3 tablespoons of dried peppermint (or 4 tea bags) to a quart jar and steep for 10 minutes. Add the infusion to your bath. You get the added benefit of a steam inhalation while soaking in the tub!

A Versatile Herb for All Seasons

From aiding digestion to promoting mental clarity, peppermint is a true herbal treasure. Whether you grow it in your garden, sip it in a tea, or use it topically, peppermint has something to offer everyone. So, go ahead—incorporate this incredible herb into your life and discover its many benefits!

