

SPEARMINT





Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Identification	1
Spearmint vs. Peppermint	2
Spearmint: Growing, Harvesting & Preservation	2
Plant Constituents	4
Spearmint: Historical Uses	6
Spearmint: Medicinal and Culinary Uses	7
Spearmint: Simple Preparations	8
Conclusion	11

Disclaimer: These statements have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. The information provided is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease. Information is derived from traditional folk medicine theory and practice and is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice.

Spearmint: The Mother of Mints

Introduction

Spearmint (*Mentha spicata*) is a versatile herb cherished for its vibrant flavor, ease of cultivation, and rich medicinal properties. Accessible and approachable, it is a staple in gardens, kitchens, and herbal medicine cabinets worldwide. Whether it's thriving in a backyard plot or a simple potted plant on your windowsill, spearmint's abundance and adaptability make it a favorite for herbal enthusiasts and novices alike!



Identification

Spearmint is a perennial herb that typically grows between 18 to 36 inches (45–90 cm) tall. The plant has square, green stems that are characteristic of the mint family. Its leaves are lance-shaped, with serrated edges, and are bright to medium green, sometimes with a slightly wrinkled or rough texture. The leaves are aromatic, releasing a sweet, fresh mint scent when crushed or rubbed between the fingers.

Spearmint's flowers are small, tubular, and usually light purple or pale pink, forming in dense clusters at the top of the stems. They bloom in late spring to early summer and attract pollinators like bees and butterflies.

Spearmint vs. Peppermint

Spearmint (*Mentha spicata*) and peppermint (*Mentha × piperita*) are both members of the mint family but differ in composition and flavor. Spearmint is the “mother” of peppermint because peppermint is a hybrid of spearmint and water mint.

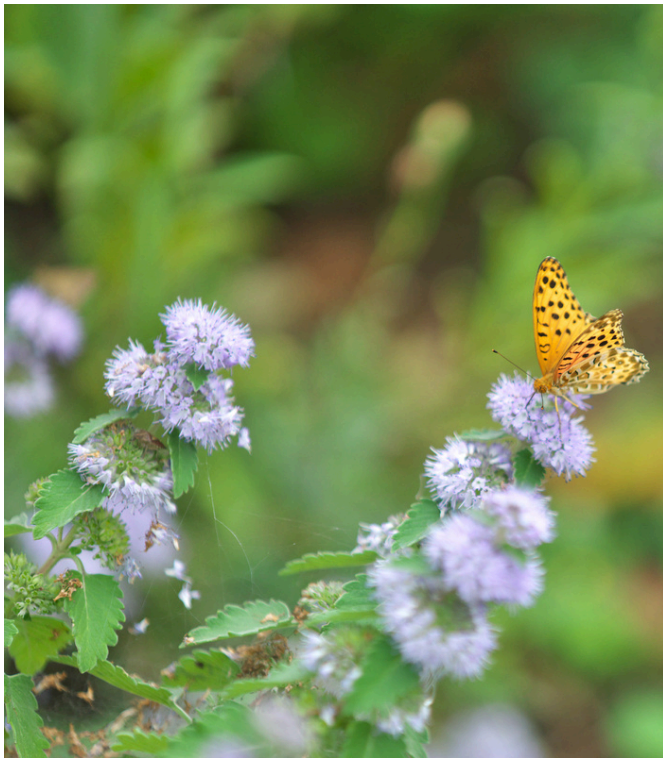
Spearmint contains carvone as its key active compound, which imparts a sweet, mild flavor, whereas peppermint is rich in menthol, giving it a sharp, cooling sensation. One of the easiest ways to distinguish spearmint from other mints (such as peppermint) is by its softer, sweeter aroma (due to its high carvone content.)

Spearmint: Growing, Harvesting & Preservation

Spearmint is a vigorous grower that can spread quickly, making it an ideal plant for containers or garden beds. It's best harvested when the plant is in full growth, typically in late spring to early summer, just before it flowers. This is when the leaves have the highest concentration of essential oils and medicinal compounds. However, spearmint leaves can be harvested throughout the growing season. Here are some helpful guidelines:



- **Pruning:** Use clean, sharp scissors or garden shears to snip off sprigs from the top of the plant. Harvesting from the top encourages the plant to grow more vigorously. Avoid cutting more than a third of the plant at once to ensure continued healthy growth.



- **Flowering:** If you want to preserve the aromatic quality of the leaves, it's best to harvest spearmint before the flowers bloom, as flowering can reduce the flavor and scent of the leaves. From a vitalist herbalism perspective, this is due to the vitality of the plant being directed away from the leaves and toward the flowers. Once the plant begins to flower, the leaves may also become slightly bitter. On the other hand, if spearmint flowers, you can harvest the flowers for teas or tinctures.

- **Storage:** After harvesting, spearmint can be used fresh or dried. To dry the leaves, bundle a few sprigs together and hang them upside down in a well-ventilated, dry area. Alternatively, you can spread the leaves out on a drying rack. Once fully dried, store the leaves in an airtight container away from sunlight to preserve their flavor and medicinal properties. Fresh leaves can also be stored in the fridge, where they will last for several days.



A Note on Growing and Care

Spearmint is a hardy, low-maintenance plant that thrives in full sun or partial shade. It prefers moist, well-drained soil but can tolerate a variety of conditions. To keep it from taking over your garden, consider planting spearmint in a container or using barriers to prevent it from spreading uncontrollably. If growing spearmint in the ground, make sure to trim the plant regularly to maintain its shape and encourage fresh growth.

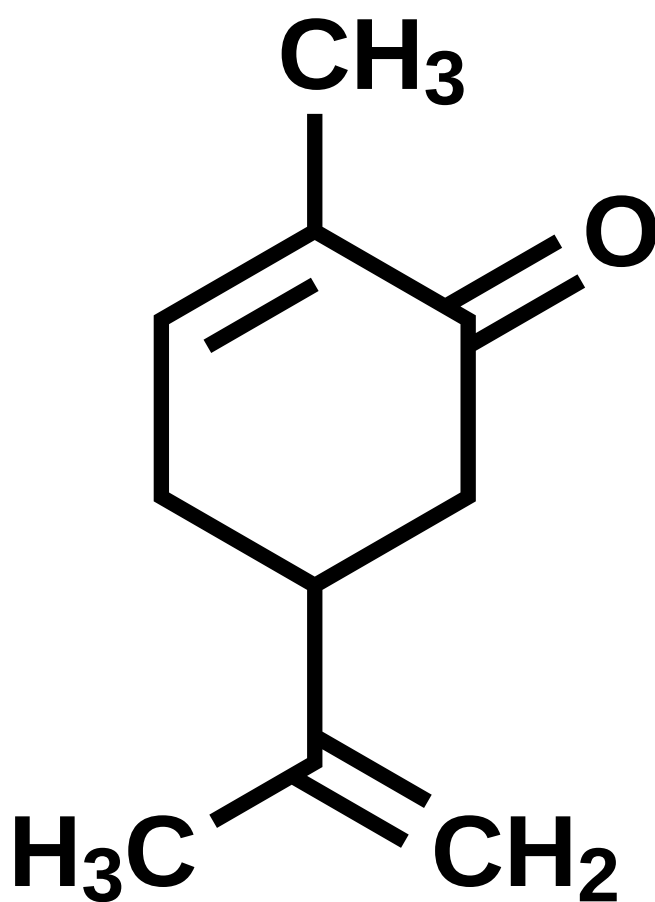


Plant Constituents

Spearmint owes its therapeutic and culinary versatility to its constituents, which include:

- **Carvone:** The primary constituent responsible for spearmint's characteristic sweet, minty aroma and digestive benefits. Spearmint tea is commonly used to relieve nausea, bloating, and indigestion. Its mild antispasmodic properties can calm an upset stomach and ease colic.

- **Limonene:** A compound with antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties.
- **Menthone:** Contributing to its mild cooling sensation and further aiding digestion.
- **Rosmarinic Acid:** A potent antioxidant that supports anti-inflammatory and antimicrobial activity. The rosmarinic acid and flavonoids in spearmint help combat inflammation and oxidative stress, making it a supportive herb for overall wellness.
- **Flavonoids:** Such as luteolin and apigenin, which contribute to spearmint's hormonal balancing and anti-androgenic effects. These anti-androgenic effects make it particularly beneficial for women's hormonal balance, including managing symptoms of polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS). Studies have shown it can help reduce excess androgens, promoting better hormonal harmony.
- **Polyphenols:** Known for their cognitive-supportive and neuroprotective benefits. Emerging research highlights spearmint's potential to support cognitive health and improve memory, with benefits attributed to its rich polyphenol content.



Carvone Structural Formula

Spearmint: Historical Uses

Spearmint's history of use dates back to ancient civilizations. The Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans were among the first to recognize the benefits of mint, both for its flavor and its medicinal properties. The herb was often used to flavor food, as well as in beverages, and was known for its refreshing qualities.



Ancient Egypt: Spearmint was used by the ancient Egyptians to make fragrant oils and perfumes, and its leaves were sometimes used in burial rites. It was also an ingredient in various formulas, often used to treat digestive ailments.

Ancient Greece and Rome:

Spearmint was widely cultivated in both Greece and Rome. The Greeks used mint to flavor wines and sauces, and it was a common herb in their baths for its invigorating aroma. The Roman naturalist Pliny the Elder mentioned spearmint in his writings, noting its ability to refresh the mind and improve digestion. Roman soldiers reportedly chewed mint to alleviate fatigue during long marches. In Roman culture, mint was also considered a symbol of hospitality, often strewn across dining rooms to enhance the atmosphere.



Medieval and Renaissance Europe: During medieval times, spearmint was frequently used in potpourris, sachets, and culinary dishes. It was believed to be a powerful herb for treating ailments like indigestion, headaches, and even mental fatigue. European herbalists often recommended spearmint as a tonic for digestive issues, particularly in the form of a tea.

Colonial America: Early settlers in the Americas continued to use spearmint for its medicinal and culinary properties. It became a staple in herb gardens, often used to flavor drinks and desserts. Native Americans utilized wild mint for similar purposes, especially for digestive complaints.



Spearmint: Medicinal and Culinary Benefits

Spearmint has been integrated into the traditional medicine systems of various cultures, often used for its soothing, digestive, and anti-inflammatory properties.

Digestive Aid: In many cultures, spearmint has been used as a remedy for digestive problems. Its soothing properties help ease stomach discomfort, reduce bloating, and alleviate nausea. Native American tribes, for instance, used spearmint as a remedy for colic, indigestion, and gas. In folk medicine, spearmint was often brewed into a tea to calm upset stomachs and improve digestion.

Mental Clarity and Relaxation: Historically, spearmint has been recognized for its ability to refresh the mind and promote mental clarity. In ancient Greece, it was believed that spearmint could enhance cognitive function and mental focus. It was also used in aromatherapy to uplift the spirit, improve concentration, and ease mental fatigue. In various cultures, spearmint was used to help reduce feelings of stress and anxiety, both in medicinal preparations and as a fragrant herb placed in living spaces.

Women's Health: Spearmint has long been used in herbal traditions to support women's health. In some cultures, it was employed to ease menstrual cramps and balance hormones. Modern herbalists continue to recommend spearmint for its potential benefits in addressing hormonal imbalances, particularly for conditions like polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), where it is believed to help lower elevated androgen levels. In folk traditions, spearmint tea was also used to relieve menstrual discomfort and encourage regular cycles.

Aromatic and Culinary Uses: Spearmint has an extensive history of culinary use, particularly for flavoring beverages like mint juleps, teas, and cocktails. It is also used in sweets, sauces, and salads. In medieval Europe, spearmint was frequently included in recipes for both savory and sweet dishes. Its refreshing taste and aroma made it a favored herb in various cultures around the world, including in Middle Eastern cuisine, where it is often added to lamb dishes and yogurt sauces.

Topical Applications: In addition to its internal uses, spearmint has been employed for its soothing qualities when applied topically. It was used in poultices and salves to relieve muscle aches, headaches, and inflammation. In some African traditions, spearmint was applied to the skin to treat wounds, rashes, and insect bites due to its mild antiseptic properties.



Spearmint: Simple Preparations

1. Spearmint Steam Inhalation

Steam inhalations are a time-tested home remedy for nasal congestion, relieving sinus pressure, and soothing respiratory discomfort. Spearmint is much gentler than peppermint and is great for children and elders. Menthol (in lower levels than peppermint) helps open up airways and reduce congestion. Carvone provides a soothing effect on the respiratory tract. Limonene acts as an anti-inflammatory and mild antimicrobial agent.

Ingredients:

- 1 handful of fresh spearmint leaves (or 2 tablespoons dried)
- 4 cups boiling water

Instructions:

1. Add spearmint leaves to a large bowl and pour in boiling water.
2. Cover your head with a towel and inhale the steam for 5–10 minutes.



2. Spearmint Tincture

Tinctures are concentrated alcohol extractions of herbal plants. Use this spearmint tincture to help regulate hormones. Carvone has mild anti-androgenic effects, which may help reduce elevated testosterone levels. Rosmarinic acid and flavonoids have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, supporting hormonal balance.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup fresh spearmint leaves, chopped
- 1 cup vodka (or another high-proof alcohol)

Instructions:

1. Place spearmint leaves in a clean glass jar.
2. Pour alcohol over the leaves, ensuring they are fully submerged.
3. Seal the jar and store in a cool, dark place for 4–6 weeks, shaking occasionally.
4. Strain and store in a dark glass bottle. Take 1–2 dropperfuls daily.

**3. Spearmint Gargle**

Salt gargles are another time-tested home remedy for sore throats. This gargle adds spearmint for an extra kick! Menthol soothes irritated mucous membranes. Tannins have mild astringent properties that help reduce throat inflammation. Rosmarinic acid offers antimicrobial and antioxidant effects.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup boiling water
- 2 teaspoons dried spearmint leaves
- 1/4 teaspoon salt

**Instructions:**

1. Steep spearmint leaves in boiling water for 10 minutes.
2. Strain and stir in salt.
3. Use the mixture to gargle for 30 seconds, repeating as needed.

4. Spearmint Oil Infusion

An oil infusion allows you to apply an herb topically in a longer-acting format than a water-based extraction. This spearmint oil infusion may help provide relief from tension and mild migraine headaches. Menthol provides a cooling sensation and relaxes tense muscles. Carvone offers calming properties, reducing stress-induced headaches. Limonene enhances circulation, alleviating tension.

Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup fresh spearmint leaves, chopped
- 1/2 cup carrier oil (e.g., almond, avocado, sunflower, or olive oils)

Instructions:

1. Combine spearmint leaves and oil in a pot or saucepan.
2. Warm for low/medium heat (no hotter than a light simmer) for 10 mins.
3. Strain and store in a dark bottle. Apply a small amount to temples and massage.

**Conclusion**

Spearmint's accessibility, vibrant aroma, and myriad benefits remind us that some of the most potent medicines and delightful flavors are right in our backyards. Whether used as a culinary herb, a remedy for hormonal or digestive health, or simply enjoyed for its refreshing taste, spearmint is truly a gentle treasure among plants!