

Healing Garden Herb Guides

Lemon balm

Botanical Names *Melissa officinalis* L.

Family: Lamiaceae

What is it?

Lemon balm is a member of the mint family native to Southern Europe. It can grow widely in gardens and natural wasteland around the world. The leaves produce a characteristically lemony scent when rubbed. The plant can grow to a variety of heights, depending upon the space available. The pale green leaves arise from erect square stems, branching little at first, but much more at flowering. The small typically labiate ie. two-lipped white flowers grow in cymes of 3-5 in the upper leaf axils. The roots do not 'creep' in stolons like true mints.



How can I grow it?

Lemon balm makes a great plant for anyone to grow themselves, even in a window box. It can be started from seed, into pots of sowing compost in the spring, covered with a thin layer of sieved compost and placed in a heated propagator. After seeds have germinated, which can take up to three weeks, transplant seedlings to their own pots when they are large enough to handle. Alternatively plants can be bought in nurseries for direct transplantation. Plants will also thrive in any moist, well drained soil, in sun or partial shade. Cut back plants after flowering and break up larger clumps to keep the plants rejuvenated.

How can I use it?

- **Eating**

Lemon balm leaves will give a lemony kick to salads, sauces, vinegars and fish dishes – they are best used fresh, rather than cooked.

- **Healing**

Lemon balm gently calms the digestive and the nervous system. It is of particular use where a digestive upset is exacerbated by stress and anxiety, with symptoms like acid reflux. It is also helpful where stress affects the chest and heart, with symptoms like palpitations and hyperventilation.

Lemon balm tea also has a gentle lifting effect that can be very comforting in low moods. In Germany it has long been seen as particularly active on the central nervous system. Modern research supports this view.

For its full health benefits you should aim to have at least 3 and up to 12 grams of dried herb daily, in teas.

Is there anything to watch out for?

Lemon balm is very safe, and no adverse effects have been reported.

For much more information read about lemon balm on HerbalReality.com

A Lemon Balm Recipe

Lemon balm pesto: enliven many favourite standby meals!

1. Take equal quantities of chopped fresh lemon balm leaves, grated parmesan cheese and pine nuts.
2. Put in a food blender and add a splash of olive oil and some ground pepper.
3. Blend till you get a fine pesto; add more oil if needed.
4. Use as a dip or add to pasta, fresh-cooked vegetables, baked potatoes, risotto or almost any dish you can imagine!



The College of Medicine is grateful for the support of Pukka Herbs in creating Healing Gardens at health centres, schools and other locations.