

Healing Garden Herb Guides

Mint

Botanical Names *Mentha spp.*

Family: Lamiaceae

What is it?

All mints are easily identified by the fresh minty scent and taste of their leaves. They have characteristic creeping rhizomes, from which new shoots grow, up to 60cm in height. Mint leaves are finely serrated, and like other labiates the stems of the plant are square. The flowers of mint plants are often a pale purple and will form tight whorls around the stem.

Many familiar mints are actually botanical hybrids.

Peppermint (*Mentha x piperita*) is a hybrid of *M.*

aquatica (water mint) and *M. spicata* (spearmint – itself a hybrid of *M. longifolia* and *M. suaveolens*).



How can I grow it?

Mints are easily grown from pot plants or by transplanting root clumps. They prefer moist soil and partial shade. They are very invasive as their roots creep through the ground so if you should use a container or bucket to prevent them encroaching on other plants.

How can I use it?

- **Eating**

Mints are widely used in the kitchen. The most common culinary mint is spearmint which adds a great flavour when cooked with garden peas, courgettes, and other vegetables. It transforms a classic pea soup. It is also the basis of mint sauce used with lamb: this can be simply made at home with a little cider/wine vinegar, Dijon mustard and a touch of sugar.

- **Healing**

Try mint teas for almost any digestive upset to see if they help. They can provide almost immediate relief, and if so you can be encouraged to increase the strength to suit you, perhaps two or more teabags per cup, steeped for at least 15 minutes. Symptoms that could be relieved include heartburn, dyspepsia, nausea, cramping, bloating and gas. If mint is not helpful there will be no harm done and you could try a different tea like chamomile, fennel, lemon balm or ginger for example, until you find the one that suits you best.

The menthol in mint makes the tea useful as a decongestant. Try sipping and inhaling the steam from a hot peppermint tea if you have a stuffy nose or sinuses, or have earache caused by blockage of the eustachian tube from the throat to the middle ear (otitis media).

Mint is both calming and refreshing: it will both help settle before bedtime and get you started in the morning. Magic!

Is there anything to watch out for?

Mints are generally very safe. There have been some problems with peppermint oil (a much more concentrated form of the plant) including skin reactions and upsets in digestion. Mints contain quite high tannin levels and large quantities of tea taken regularly may interfere with iron absorption, so this should be avoided if you are anaemic.

For much more information read about mint at HerbalReality.com

A Mint Recipe

Fresh mint and crème fraiche dip: a refreshing summer appetiser or side dish.

1. Choose the amount of crème fraiche you need (half-fat is a healthy option and easily obtained from supermarkets - you can also use yoghurt though crème fraiche is wonderfully smooth).
2. Mix in a dash of olive oil and lemon juice.
3. Chop fresh mint leaves to taste (be generous!).
4. Add further chives, chopped spring onions and/or dill to taste.
5. Serve with bread, poppadoms or raw vegetable sticks.

This is also great as a raita substitute to cool the palate if eating hot curries.

