

Peppermint

Latin Name: *Mentha pipertita*

Also known as: Balm Mint, Curled Mint, Brandy Mint, Lamb Mint, Lammint, American Peppermint, Northern Mint, White Peppermint, and Black Peppermint

Scientific Classification

The genus *Mentha* is composed of at least 25 species that tend to freely hybridize and integrate. Besides peppermint and spearmint (*M. spicata*) that are considered official, other distinct species demonstrating similar therapeutic properties are water mint (*M. aquatica*), field mint (*M. arvensis*), and European horsemint (*M. longifolia*).

Family: Lamiaceae – mint family
Genus: *Mentha* – mint
Species: *M. x piperita* – peppermint

Influence on the Body	(PRINCIPAL ACTIONS are listed in CAPITAL LETTERS)
<i>Addictions</i>	smoking
<i>Blood and Circulatory System</i>	mild alterative (purifies and cleanses the blood) • HEART • HEART PALPITATIONS
<i>Body System</i>	stimulant • tonic • pale countenance • FAINTING • SHOCK • astringent (increases the tone and firmness of tissues) • insomnia • NIGHTMARES
<i>Digestive Tract</i>	AROMATIC (contains volatile oils which aid digestion and relieve gas) • IMPROVES APPETITE • HEARTBURN • DIGESTIVE AID • GASTRIC STIMULANT • STOMACHIC (strengthens stomach function) • DYSPEPSIA (indigestion) • GAS • CARMINATIVE (relieves intestinal gas, promotes peristaltic movement) • COLIC • ANTI-NAUSEATE • ANTIEMITIC (helps prevent vomiting) • motion sickness • seasickness • VOMITING • STOMACH SPASMS • stomach cramps • griping • DIARRHEA • constipation • COLITIS • diverticulitis • ulcers • DYSENTERY
<i>Ears</i>	earache
<i>Infections and Immune System</i>	CHILLS • COUGHS • COLDS • anti-bacterial • anti-viral • herpes simplex • anti-microbial • antiseptic • FEVERS • FEBRIFUGE (reduces fever) • FLU • childhood diseases • measles • cholera
<i>Inflammation</i>	inflammation • rheumatism • gout

<i>Liver</i>	liver • cholagogue (promotes the flow of bile) • gallbladder
<i>Lungs and Respiratory System</i>	BRONCHITIS • hiccup
<i>Mouth, Nose & Throat</i>	toothaches • mouth sores • mouthwash • sore throats • gargle
<i>Muscles</i>	muscle spasms • lumbago (back pain)
<i>Nervous System</i>	NERVINE (soothes and strengthens nerves) • neuralgia (sharp, stabbing pains due to deposits or congestion putting pressure on nerves) • analgesic (relieves pain) • anodyne (relieves pain and lessens the excitability of nerves) • dizziness • HEADACHE • nervous headache • migraine • convulsions • antispasmodic • depression • hysteria • calmative (gently calms nerves) • sedative
<i>Reproductive System</i>	<i>Female:</i> • morning sickness • menstruation pain • menstrual cramps • menstrual obstructions • emmenagogue (promotes menstrual flow)
<i>Skin, Tissues & Hair</i>	boils • itching • shingles • diaphoretic (promotes perspiration, increasing elimination through the skin) • the oil is rubefacient (increases blood flow to the skin and local reddening)
<i>Other Uses</i>	MINT FLAVORING AGENT • MENTHOL

Key Properties:

- DIGESTIVE AID – has a refreshing, uplifting scent, improves appetite, settles the stomach, relieves gas and intestinal spasms, strengthens and soothes the digestive system
- NERVINE – Stimulates and strengthens the nervous system, revives sensibility, gently calms nerves, spasms, convulsions, cramps, and relieves pain
- STIMULANT – Warms, induces perspiration, cools to the touch, improves circulation, cleanses the blood

Primarily affecting: STOMACH • INTESTINES • NERVES • MUSCLES
• CIRCULATION

History	'Peppermint', the herb's common name, comes from the species name 'piperita' meaning peppery. Pliny, a Roman naturalist of the first century tells us that the Greeks and Romans crowned themselves with peppermint at their feasts
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and adorned their tables with its sprays. Their cooks flavored both sauces and wines with its essence.

Two species of mint were used by ancient Greek physicians, but some writers doubt whether either was the modern peppermint plant we know today. There is evidence that *M. piperita* was cultivated by the Egyptians. It is mentioned also in Chinese medical literature as early as 659 AD and in the Icelandic Pharmacopoeias of the 13th century.

References to 'mint' appear in medieval texts, and through the centuries it became a symbol for purity and hospitality. Tables and floors were scrubbed with the refreshing essence.

The peppermint species we know today was recognized as a distinct species in the 1696, 2nd edition of *Synopsis Methodica Stirpium Britannicorum* by John Ray (English naturalist 1627-1705). It was found growing in England as a natural hybrid of spearmint and water mint. Peppermint's medicinal properties were soon recognized, and it was admitted into the London Pharmacopoeia in 1721, under *M. piperitis* sapore.

Colonists carried peppermint to the New World and used it for digestive complaints such as heartburn, nausea, colic, and gas, to cure hiccups, to induce sleep, to relieve headaches, and as a general stimulant to the body. Native Americans used peppermint for bowel complaints, toning the digestive tract, healing colds, and controlling fevers.

Peppermint leaf is approved in Germany for use in muscle spasms of the gastrointestinal tract as well as for spasms of the gallbladder and bile ducts.

The Japanese have long recognized the value of extracted menthol, and over 200 years ago carried it about with them in little silver boxes hanging from their girdles. The distillation of peppermint oil forms a considerable industry in Japan. Most of the menthol is taken out of their essential oil for other uses. By cooling the oil, the menthol separates and crystallizes out, leaving a cheaper though marketable by-product of dementholized oil.

The cheapest variety of peppermint essential oil available in commerce is the partially dementholized oil imported from Japan. Adulteration of American peppermint oil with dementholized Japanese oil is frequently practiced. Other

	<p>essential oil adulterations exist, mixing peppermint with other herbs before distillation, using synthetic oils, etc.</p> <p>These cheaper oils are used most often for their mint-like scent and flavor, but do not contain the same therapeutic properties as pure peppermint essential oil.</p>
<p>Attributes</p>	<p><u>Key Components:</u> (including, but not limited to)</p>
	<p>Vitamins <u>A</u> • <u>C</u> • <u>Copper</u> • <u>Iron</u> • <u>Magnesium</u> • <u>Potassium</u> • <u>Sulfur</u> • other <u>Trace Minerals</u></p> <p><u>Menthol</u> (30-48 percent of the essential oil is menthol)</p> <p>Menthol is the chief constituent of peppermint oil. It is antibacterial, antiviral, and anti-spasmodic.</p>
<p><i>Opposing Properties</i></p>	<p>Peppermint has seemingly opposing properties that affect the system according to what resonates with the body's needs. The herb can be calming or energizing; sedative or stimulating; warming or cooling – all depending on how the body puts it to use.</p> <p>Peppermint has warming, stimulating, digestive, antispasmodic, and decongestive properties. Peppermint and elder tea is a traditional treatment for flu, pneumonia and high fever diseases. Both the herb and the essential oil are very versatile when combined with other herb and oil formulas, adding a freshness to them, and boosting the combination's therapeutic actions.</p>
<p><i>Digestion</i></p>	<p>Peppermint is one of the oldest and most popular remedies for simple colic and minor bloat in children and adults. It may be used in pregnancy to soothe the stomach, relieve nausea and alleviate vomiting. It is excellent for calming a queasy stomach caused by motion sickness, sea sickness, morning sickness, or illness.</p> <p>Peppermint oil temporarily quiets hunger pangs in the stomach, but they will return if the stomach is not satisfied. Peppermint stimulates digestion, increases bile flow, and strengthens and tones the stomach.</p> <p>Menthol relaxes the lower sphincter muscle of the esophagus, aiding digestion and easing gas, burping and bloating after eating. It helps to prevent the gripping effect caused by disease or strong laxatives, and is a favorite remedy for soothing the intestinal tract. Peppermint is</p>

excellent for diarrhea, ulcers and colitis. Peppermint tea enemas are very useful for colonic problems.

In 2007, Italian investigators reported that 75 percent of patients in their study who took peppermint oil capsules for 4 weeks, had a major reduction in irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) symptoms. Another study involving 146 individuals with IBS, found that peppermint provided significant relief from abdominal cramps. Research shows that coated capsules permit peppermint oil to reach the colon without breaking down in the stomach, and it is believed by some to be more effective in healing IBS and lower bowel afflictions because of this.

Nervous System

Peppermint is good for the nerves. It is one of the great stimulant herbs. Using a strong peppermint tea is excellent for chills and a pale countenance. Peppermint can assist the body in raising internal heat. It strengthens the nerves and heart muscle and acts as a marvelous antispasmodic. The oil inhibits smooth muscle cramping and is good for helping alleviate infant convulsions.

Conversely, peppermint can act as a mild, soothing sedative for nervous and restless individuals of all ages, and promote relaxation and sleep.

Peppermint is used in plasters for neuralgia, rheumatism, chronic gout, and lumbago. Peppermint oil can be used instead of aspirin for neuralgic headaches by rubbing it on the temples or areas of discomfort (remember to keep the oil out of the eyes).

Infections

Peppermint inhibits the growth of bacteria and fungus and is excellent for fevers and flu. It also relieves symptoms of allergy and asthma. Drinking hot peppermint tea induces perspiration, which purges toxins and cools down the body. Using peppermint in a bath cools the body and helps soothe itching skin.

Cleansing

Peppermint increases respiration, the oxygen supply in the blood, and cleanses the blood. As a nerve stimulant it strengthens and tones the entire body.

Commercial Uses

The oil is used for its well-known, refreshing, minty taste in toothpaste, dental creams, mouthwash, cough drops, candies, chewing gum, and baked goods.

Menthol is an active ingredient in Vicks VapoRub (used for

	<p>chest congestion) and in local anesthetics such as Solarcaine and Ben-gay.</p> <p>Unfortunately, most of the menthol used commercially is synthetically produced rather than extracted from peppermint, thereby missing out on most of the long-term healing properties that could be obtained if the natural oil was used.</p>
Herb Parts Used	Leaves, stem, essential oil
Preparations and Remedies	<p>Peppermint is most often used as a tea, powdered and included in herb combinations, or distilled into an essential oil. The oil is often adulterated or artificially made, but these products do not effectively duplicate peppermint's true aroma or the medicinal effects of real peppermint oil.</p>
<i>Powdered Formula</i>	<i>Liver Formula:</i> (see MILK THISTLE preparations)
<i>Infusions</i>	<p><i>Do not boil peppermint leaves, as the medicinal principles are extremely volatile and will be lost.</i></p> <p>Peppermint leaves make a delicious, mild tea. The infusion is a wonderful beverage and can be taken hot in the winter and cold in the summer.</p> <p>Do not underestimate the powerful healing effects of peppermint tea. It seems mild, yet it is very effective in so many areas of health and rejuvenation.</p> <p><i>Peppermint Tea:</i> Pour boiling water over the leaves (1 teaspoon herb to 1 cup water). Cover and keep in a warm place for 10 minutes. Strain, sweeten and drink hot or cold. Drink a hot, strong peppermint tea for fainting or dizzy spells. It can also soothe the gastrointestinal area irritated by foods and unripe fruits. A strong cup of peppermint tea and 10 minutes of relaxation can often prevent the need for aspirin.</p> <p><i>Alkaline Formula Tea:</i> (see DANDELION preparations)</p>
<i>Enemas</i>	<p><i>Cold and Flu Tea:</i> (see YARROW preparations) Use peppermint tea as an excellent enema for cholera, colon problems, convulsions, and stomach spasms, even for children.</p>
<i>Poultices</i>	For gastrointestinal complaints, the fresh leaves may be bruised and applied to the stomach and the tea taken

	internally.
<i>Compress</i>	<p><i>Cooling Compress:</i> ½ cup Peppermint leaves 1 quart Distilled Water Ice cubes</p> <p>Pour boiling water over peppermint leaves, cover and let steep until cool and then strain. After the mixture has cooled down, put in the freezer or add ice cubes to make the infusion really cold. Soak a cloth in the tea and wring it out so that it does not drip and yet still retains enough liquid to stay cold. Apply the cloth to the body. When the cloth warms, re-soak and re-apply. Repeat this procedure three to five times, adding ice cubes, if necessary, to keep the liquid cold. When finished, dry the area thoroughly.</p> <p>Use this compress to cool fevers and reduce swelling. This preparation can help stimulate the production of both white and red blood cells and reduce pulse rate and fevers, especially when applied to the feet.</p>
<i>Peppermint Essential Oil</i>	Essential oils are concentrated and powerful. A few drops are all that are needed for therapeutic effects. Keep away from eyes and mucous membranes. If contact burning occurs, dilute with a carrier oil like coconut oil or extra virgin olive oil.
<i>Inhalant</i>	<p>Boil 2 quarts water, remove from heat and add 5-10 drops peppermint oil. Quickly enclose the pot and head with a heavy blanket or towel to capture the steam and inhale deeply through the mouth and nostrils.</p> <p>Menthol inhalation can help open the sinuses and relieve bronchial cough, colds and flu symptoms. It is also an excellent facial steam bath.</p> <p><i>Alternative:</i> Inhale peppermint oil directly from the container to reduce jet lag and vitalize the mind.</p>
<i>Gargle</i>	Use one drop peppermint oil to one cup water for a stimulating and antiseptic gargle for canker sores, bad breath, bleeding gums, or pyorrhea.
<i>Rub</i>	For toothache or tender gums, rub the afflicted area directly with one drop peppermint oil.

	<p>Apply essential oil externally on affected areas for rheumatism, neuralgia, and sore muscles. Rub the back of the neck with one drop peppermint oil neat (directly on the skin) or diluted in one teaspoon olive oil.</p>
<i>Soak</i>	To refresh sore feet, add 5 drops of peppermint oil to a large bowl of cold water. Bathe the feet and ankles for 10 minutes.
<i>Sponge Bath</i>	<p><i>For Fevers:</i> Menthol coolness helps to control body temperature. Peppermint essential oil blended in a carrier oil (such as almond or olive oil) and applied on the bottoms of an overheated, feverish child or adult's feet, can gently reduce and regulate body temperature. An application of peppermint oil also helps reduce hot flashes.</p> <p>As an alternative, sponge the body with cool water to which has been added one drop each of eucalyptus, peppermint and lavender oils.</p>
<i>Drops</i>	<p><i>Digestive Aid:</i> To aid digestion and relieve an upset stomach, place one drop peppermint oil in a half cup of water and slowly sip.</p> <p><i>Caution:</i> Use only pure peppermint essential oil for internal applications. Synthetic or adulterated oils may cause illness when ingested.</p> <p><i>Rodent Repellent:</i> Place several drops of peppermint oil on cotton balls and place them in problem locations to repel mice.</p>
Safety	<p>No health hazards or adverse side effects are known.</p> <p>Essential oils are potent, only a small amount is needed. They should never be put into the eyes nor directly contact mucous membranes. If contact burning occurs, soothe the area with a carrier oil such as almond or olive oil. Be careful to purchase only pure essential oils when using them for therapeutic purposes.</p>
Plant Profile	<p><i>Natural Habitat:</i> The plant is indigenous to Europe and is now widely cultivated throughout all regions of the world including North America.</p>
<i>Description</i>	Peppermint is a hybrid plant of spearmint (<i>M. spicata</i>) and

water mint (*M. aquatica*). The well-known scent of 'mint' is the aroma of peppermint. Menthol, a principal component of peppermint oil, gives the 'cool' sensation felt on the skin and upon inhalation. Peppermint is the most pungent of all the mints. The entire plant has a characteristic odor due to the volatile oil present in all of its parts.

Peppermint is an herbaceous perennial plant (dies back in winter and grows back from a persistent rootstock each year) which reaches one to three feet tall. It has smooth, square, purple stems (not greenish as in spearmint) and dark green (sometimes tinged with purple) opposing leaves that are toothed on the margins. The rhizomes (underground root or stem) are wide-spreading and fleshy with bare, fibrous roots.

It is easy to confuse spearmint with peppermint. Spearmint grows wild along ditch banks and has dull leaves whereas peppermint has shiny leaves and requires special growing conditions.

Peppermint typically grows in moist habitats, including sides of streams and drainage ditches. Flowers appear in July and August and are pale violet or whitish on terminal spikes. They are usually sterile, producing no seeds. Peppermint principally reproduces vegetatively through its spreading rhizomes.

A crop that yields a high percentage of essential oil exhausts the soil. After cropping with peppermint for four years, the land must be put to some other purpose for at least seven years. In some areas, plantations are renewed annually to strengthen their yield.

Growing Peppermint

Peppermint generally thrives in shade and spreads quickly by underground rhizomes. When growing peppermint, it is advisable to plant prepared cuttings in a container, otherwise it can rapidly take over the whole garden. Place a saucer beneath the pot to prevent the roots from creeping into the ground. Peppermint needs a good water supply, and it is ideal for planting in part-sun to shaded areas.

Planting

Today, peppermint is cultivated through vegetative propagation. Seeds require especially favorable conditions and only a small percentage will thrive. Root starts or cuttings grow rapidly in a glass of water. Transplant rooted starts in pots with well-soaked heavy soil. Be careful to keep different mints apart, as they cross hybridize easily. The

plant prefers cool and moist conditions.

Harvesting

The leaves and flowering tops are the usable portion of the plant. For drying, collect herbs just before the plant blooms, during dry weather (August through September). If harvesting for oil, collect just after the flowers have opened for best potency. However, the plant may be used fresh at any time.

Wild peppermint is less suitable for commercial use. Cultivated plants have been selected for higher yield and better oil content. Peppermint seeds sold at many stores will generally not germinate into true peppermint, but more likely into a poor-scented spearmint plant. True peppermint rarely produces seeds of its own. I recommend you find a reliable source of certified seeds and roots such as Horizon Herbs out of Oregon.

Drying

Just before blooming, cut the stalks and hang upside down in bunches to dry. Hang the cut plant inside paper bags (slotted on the sides for ventilation) and store the herbs in airtight containers once they are sufficiently dried.

Freezing

Peppermint leaves may be frozen. Harvest the herb at its peak and wash gently, but thoroughly, then pat dry. Herbs may be chopped by hand or in the food processor until the pieces are the right size to use for teas and other recipes. Pack and seal in freezer bags, first squeezing out the air until herbs are in a flat layer. Label the bags immediately, as many herbs look alike. When ready to use, simply break off what is needed and return the rest to the freezer.