

PEPPERMINT



Plant/Part: Herb/Leaves and Flowering tops (Source: Japan and USA)

Latin Name: Mentha piperita

Family: Lamiaceae (Labiatae)

Extraction: Distillation

AROMA: Strong piercing, sharp, menthol fragrance.

PROPERTIES: Peppermint is an energising oil with a penetrating, minty aroma. It helps to relieve fatigue and muscle pain. Use it in the daytime, as its energising effect may keep you awake at night. Add to a massage blend for the digestive system. Excellent for refreshing tired head and feet. Sniff from bottle or one drop on handkerchief to revive during travel. Has a dual action - cooling when hot and warming when cold. This makes it a good remedy for colds by halting mucous and fevers and encouraging

perspiration. Useful in respiratory disorders generally as well as dry coughs and sinus congestion. Reputedly has an effect on asthma, bronchitis, cholera, pneumonia and tuberculosis, and some relief may also be gained from rheumatism, neuralgia and muscular aches. Especially good at relaxing stomach muscles and dealing with intestinal problems.

CHEMICAL CONSTITUENTS: Menthol, Carvone, Cineol, Limonene, Menthone, Pinene, Thymol.

PRECAUTIONS: Care be taken with dosage. Probably best use is in infusers rather than massage though might be okay in local areas. It is likely to irritate the skin and mucous membranes however, and certainly should be kept well away from the eyes. Best avoided in pregnancy and by nursing mothers since could discourage flow of milk. May antidote homeopathic remedies

BLENDS: Orange, Chamomile, Lavender, Sandalwood.

Digestive: stimulates the production of gastric juices (carminative) and bile (cholagogue), relaxes the digestive muscles, tones the stomach, improves appetite, used for colic, cramp, dyspepsia, flatulence, nausea (also caused by sea or travel sickness), indigestion, diarrhoea, stomach pains. helps to break up gallstones.

Genito-Urinary: stimulates the production of menstrual blood (emmenagogue), used for dysmenorrhoea. relaxing, pain-relieving, useful for menstrual cramps.

Circulatory: causes narrowing of blood vessels, raises blood pressure (used for hypotension).

Respiratory: antispasmodic, antiseptic, helps to expel mucus, used for asthma, coughing, catarh, bronchitis, sinusitis, flu. (tisserand even urges his readers to "always use peppermint instead of aspirin"). clears sinuses and can improve breathing.



Muscles/Joints: relaxing, pain-relieving, used for muscular pains, sprains and neuralgia.

Skin/Hair: anti-inflammatory (one of the best), pain-relieving, antiseptic, astringent, relieves itching, used for acne, dermatitis. (for itching it should be used in very small concentration - less than 1 %) stimulates circulation and can enliven dull, congested skin. used in the treatment of broken capillaries and varicose veins.

Emotions/Mind: clears the head, increases alertness, strengthens the nervous system (nervine), used for fainting, headache, mental fatigue, migraine, stress. "if you think too much, or have a hot head, it will cool you down" (tisserand). dissipates anger.

General: due to its pain-relieving properties used for toothache (one of the strongest analgesics among the essential oils). causes sweating, combats fever

Cautions: in higher concentrations possible sensitization (because of menthol content)

Peppermint (*Mentha Piperata*) is another plant native to Europe (although the U.S.A. now produces more essential oil than any other country) and has been widely used for thousands of years. It was used for its digestive properties by the Romans, and probably by the Egyptians before them.

The active principles of Peppermint oil include menthol - the most important element - mentone, Limonene, menthene and phellandrene. English plants are said to produce the best quality oil because of their moderate climate. Although menthol is extracted and extensively used in pharmaceutical products, it is more effective when used in its 'whole' slate, i.e., as an integral part of the essential oil. This is true of many essential oils. Commercially the oil is used in flavouring toothpaste, various medicines and, of course, in confectionery.



Peppermint is best known as a remedy for digestive upsets and has a beneficial action on the stomach, liver and intestines. It is valuable in colic, diarrhoea, indigestion, vomiting and stomach pain because of its antispasmodic action which will relieve the smooth muscles of the stomach and gut. Use it, well diluted, to massage the stomach and abdomen in a clockwise direction. Peppermint tea can be drunk to assist the effects of the massage.

Peppermint is also helpful for colds and 'flu, particularly used in conjunction with Lavender, Marjoram and some of the other oils that are used in these conditions. Its warming and stimulating properties are particularly valuable at the onset of a cold, to combat the chilly and depressed feelings that often precede the sneezing, runny nose and feverishness. In a bath, do not use more than 3 drops, as more than this will produce a curious tingling which

is more pronounced on people with sensitive skins.

Peppermint can also be used for its cooling effect in feverish conditions. This is not as paradoxical as it may seem, for the 'warming' effect is, in fact, due to the body's vigorous reaction to the cooling action of Peppermint. Peppermint also induces sweating, which will help to reduce a fever in a natural way. It can also be used in a steam inhalation to clear the nasal passages and sinuses. It can be used combined with Lavender as each of these oils enhances the action of the other. Steaming can also be used to cleanse and decongest the skin, especially in acne. It has a mildly antiseptic effect which helps to control the bacteria on the surface of the skin.

Cold compresses of Peppermint, or Peppermint and Lavender, applied to the forehead and temples will relieve headache, and sometimes migraine, though not all migraine sufferers can tolerate the smell once an attack has begun. The compresses are most effective if they can be applied at the first sign of pain. Both these oils are effective painkillers, but while Peppermint is stimulant, Lavender is sedative. This combination of stimulant and sedative is found in many commercial pain-killing preparations (aspirin, phenacetin and caffeine, for example) but with the important difference that essential oils do not merely suppress the pain, but work on its causes, such as blocked sinuses, a congested liver, or mental fatigue.

Peppermint is one of the oils described as 'cephalic', that is, they stimulate the brain and aid clear thinking. (Rosemary and Basil are two others.) Any of these oils will physically clear the head, leaving the user feeling fresh and bright and ready for mental effort. Peppermint is sometimes used as an emergency treatment for shock, because of its stimulant properties. Just put a few drops on a tissue, or inhale directly from the bottle. This can also help to relieve nausea.

Vermin, both six-legged and four-legged, dislike the strong odour of Peppermint, so it is a useful deterrent. Peppermint sprinkled on the runs of mice, rats, ants or cockroaches will offend them, and they will usually go away. You could combine the Peppermint with another strong-smelling oil, Eucalyptus for example. If you wish to get rid of such pests, but do not want to take another creature's life, this offers a pleasing alternative to poisons, as well as presenting no risk to domestic animals or young children.

Finally, two warnings:

Peppermint should not be used if any homoeopathic remedies are being taken, and must be stored far away from such remedies, as it can antidote them.

Do not use Peppermint in the evening, as it can cause wakefulness. It is unwise to use it over long periods, as it may cause considerable disturbance of the normal sleep pattern.

