

~ Ask Granny Earth ~

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Borage

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A friend of mine gave me a few Borage plants. I've never heard of Borage before and don't know anything about it. What is it used for and does it need any special care?

You are so lucky to have borage plants and a friend who cares enough to give them to you. Several years ago I had a friend, who traded me a Borage plant for one of my Comfrey plants. I have enjoyed having this beautiful herb, with its blue, star shaped flowers, in my garden every year since then. Comfrey comes back year after year, but Borage does not. It's an annual and needs re-seeded, or if you make sure the dirt under and around the plant is soft and free from weeds, it will self-seed for next year.

Borage (*Borago officinalis*): Most authorities consider that the Latin name *Borago* (from which Borage is taken) is a corruption of *corago*; from *cor* (the heart) and *ago* (I bring). Historically, herbalists have considered Borage to be an herb of courage; making a man merry and joyful.

Plant your Borage in a sunny spot in your garden and cluster the plants, since they tend to get 'leggy'. I always end up supporting them with a stick, or tying them to the garden fence post to keep them from falling down after heavy rains. It will thrive in poor to moderate soil and little water. So basically it needs very little attention, except for supporting it to keep it from falling over.

Borage grows up to 2 ½ feet high and about 2 feet wide. The leaves are wrinkled, long ovals, covered with prickly little hairs. The flower clusters sit atop long, hollow, prickly stems, which come out of the leaf base. The clusters of vibrant, blue star shaped flowers droop, as if in need of water and attract lots of honey bees.

All parts of the plant have a refreshing cucumber smell and flavor, but because of the thistly hairs, the stem and leaves are rarely used as food. However, the flowers are a special treat when added to a summer salad or on top of a scoop of yogurt or cottage cheese. If you're looking for a way to impress your afternoon guests, try serving them a glass of iced tea with *Borage flower* ice cubes. If you forget to make the ice cubes, just add the flowers to any summer drink. The Romans were the first to use Borage in this way; sprinkling them into a goblet of wine. It was believed to drive away sadness. We now know that the flowers contain large amounts of essential fatty acids (GLA).

Without adequate amounts of GLA (gamma-linoleic acid) the body goes into a state of chronic inflammation which promotes onset of heart disease, diabetes, alcoholism, atopic dermatitis, premenstrual syndrome, rheumatoid arthritis, cancer, high blood pressure and more. GLA also benefits circulatory health by reducing cholesterol and LDL (low-density lipoprotein- the bad cholesterol) levels as it increases the beneficial HDL (High-density lipoprotein). An excellent way to get the benefits of Borage's GLA is by ingesting Flaxseed /Borage oil which is available at your favorite health food store.

From earliest times Borage was credited with inducing calm and fortitude. Today we are fortunate to have modern scientific research to document its medicinal qualities. It contains a compound (phytochemical), which when taken internally, not only helps to relieve inflammatory conditions, but also balances the function of the adrenal glands.

Use it as a tonic for the adrenals - over a long period of time in the form of a tea: Pour a cup of boiling water onto 2 or 3 teaspoonfuls of the dried herb (leaves) and infuse for 10 – 15 minutes. Drink 2 or 3 times a day with a little honey to taste. When applied externally, it aids in the relief of eczema.

When your Borage plants are in full bloom (June, July and August), pick a few long stems. (If you're planning on saving some seeds for next year, leave a few stems and flowers. As the flowers finish blooming, watch for and

collect the large, black seeds) Tie them together at the cut end and hang them upside down in a warm, airy room away from sunlight. When the leaves are completely dry, (a few weeks to be sure) skin them off and put into a brown paper bag for storage (at least a few more weeks). When you're sure they're completely dry, you can transfer the leaves to a jar. Complete drying is essential to prevent mold from forming. I suggest using the completely dried herb for tea or tinctures.

Enjoy your wonderful Borage plants! Don't be afraid to pick and eat a few flowers in the morning when you walk through your garden. Let yourself just be aware of the sun on your skin, as you savor the delicate taste of Borage. A spiritual joy beyond words!