

~ Ask Granny Earth ~

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Mint

ASK GRANNY EARTH

The Mint is still growing in my garden. Will it stay green all winter? Although I love it, I'm lacking information on its healing properties. Is it too late to dry it?

There are many varieties of Mint, but the most common and hardy ones around here are Peppermint and Spearmint. Because of our mild weather, it's still growing quite well. But it will succumb to the severe frosts, which are just around the corner. You could cut it back now and hang it upside in a warm dry room until dry. Then just crumble the leaves and put them in a jar for later use as tea this winter. Don't worry about cutting it back....it will return again next year even better and stronger than before.

The Mint family is comprised of 25 species, which are grown for use as culinary herbs, essential oils and medicinal teas. Spearmint and Peppermint have been around for centuries, with earliest records from Egypt and Japan. The ancients used Mint to scent their bath water and as a restorative. The generic name, *Mentha* is derived from the Greek legend of Menthe, a nymph who because of the love Pluto bore her, was metamorphosed (by Proserpine from motives of jealousy) into the plant we now call Mint.

All Mint has creeping root-stocks which produce erect, square stems that rise to a height of about 2 feet. They bear short, pointed, wrinkled, bright green leaves with finely toothed edges and smooth surfaces. The small pinkish flowers are densely arranged in whorls in the axis of the upper leaves, forming slender tapering spikes that bloom from July through September. You can harvest it for drying when it's in full bloom. Cut long stems and tie together in bunches. Hang upside down in a warm dry place for several weeks and when thoroughly dry, skin the leaves and store in a bag or jar for later use. The original plant will continue to grow, giving you another bloom later in the summer. Although Mint will grow almost anywhere, it does prefer a moist soil and a partially shaded area. Once started, it will take over and you'll find yourself pulling it out to give to friends.

Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*): Piperita comes from the Latin - piper, meaning pepper. One of the oldest household remedies, Peppermint grows prolifically - an indication from the Universe that it is a much-needed herbal remedy.

Jethro Kloss (1863–1946), in his book, Back to Eden, states that, "Peppermint is a general and gentle stimulant. A strong cup of tea will act powerfully on the system to quickly diffuse itself and bring back to the body its natural warmth and glow without the usual tendency to relapse. It is good in cases of sudden fainting, or dizziness with extreme coldness and pale countenance. It is useful for griping pains caused by eating irritating foods."

Peppermint is traditionally used to settle the stomach, but it is also an excellent remedy for chills, fevers, dizziness, dysentery, heart problems, including palpitations, influenza and anxiety. It was used in folk medicine as an antiseptic and for nausea, gastritis, cholera, diarrhea and flatulence. For these conditions, you would prepare a tea using one ounce of the herb in a pint of boiling water. Sweeten with honey, if desired. Drinking the tea on a regular basis will cleanse and strengthen the entire body. It is also a good substitute for coffee. Externally (as a poultice), it is used for rheumatism, neuralgia and headaches.

Spearmint (*Mentha spicata*): Spicata in Latin means- to grow spikes. This would describe the shape of Spearmint's flowers. The whole plant is soothing and quieting to the nerves. Therefore, Spearmint is used for settling the stomach in cases of colic, gas, dyspepsia and nausea. It is also used to treat inflammation of the kidneys and bladder. In the book - Back to Eden, Jethro Kloss states that, "Spearmint will relieve suppressed, painful, or scalding urine and is also good for gravel in the bladder. Locally applied, it is excellent for piles and hemorrhoids."

Spearmint should not be boiled when making tea. Rather, after adding it to boiling water, cover with a lid and turn off the heat. Let it steep for 15 – 20 minutes. Add honey to taste and drink several cups a day for medicinal effects. Spearmint was used in folk medicine as an anti-cancer medicine, an

antidote for poisons, a remedy for chapped hands and to whiten teeth. Gerard (historical herbalist) gives credit to Spearmint for healing "all manner of breakings out on the skin."

Peppermint and Spearmint are the primary sources of Mint oil. They contain over 200 phytochemical compounds including menthol and menthone which give it that unmistakable smell and taste. The oil is used as a flavoring agent in mouthwashes, chewing gum, toothpastes, breath-fresheners and candies. When using Mint medicinally, it's best to use as a tea, since the oil can cause gastrointestinal upset. Mint is a very useful medicinal herb. Keep it on hand for stomach upsets, headaches, skin eruptions, and for times when you need to 'unwind'. It makes for a very calming and soothing cup of tea before going to bed.