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The use of chamomile plants as medicinal alternative

By Judi Singleton

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The chamomile plant can grow up to twenty inches tall. It is a member of the Daisy family. The chamomile flower has a strong aroma scent.

Roman chamomile is usually propagated by root division, while German chamomile seeds are sown directly in early spring. The soil should be sandy and slightly acid. Full sun is preferred except in hot, dry climates where midday shade is necessary. Chamomile can also be used around the edges of containers with other herbs. After flowering, cut back to the main growth.

The chamomile is originally from southern and eastern Europe. Through time, it has found its way in becoming a popular plant throughout Asia, North America and South America.

The fresh plant is strongly and agreeably aromatic, with a distinct scent of apples – a characteristic noted by the Greeks, on account of which they named it 'ground-apple' – kamai (on the ground) and melon (an apple) – the origin of the name Chamomile. The Spaniards call it 'Manzanilla,' which signifies 'a little apple,' and give the same name to one of their lightest sherries, flavoured with this plant.

When walked on, its strong, fragrant scent will often reveal its presence before it is seen. For this reason it was employed as one of the aromatic strewing herbs in the Middle Ages, and used often to be purposely planted in green walks in gardens. Indeed walking over the plant seems specially beneficial to it.

'Like a chamomile bed –

The more it is trodden

The more it will spread,'

The aromatic fragrance gives no hint of its bitterness of taste.

The Chamomile used in olden days to be looked upon as the 'Plant's Physician,' and it has been stated that nothing contributes so much to the health of a garden as a number of Chamomile herbs dispersed about it, and that if another plant is drooping and sickly, in nine cases out of ten, it will recover if you place a herb of Chamomile near it.

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Chamomile was known to the Romans and used for incense and in beverages. Ironically, the name 'Roman Chamomile' by which it is sometimes known, does not stem from this time, but from a rather arbitrary naming of the herb in the 19th century by a plant collector who happened to find some growing in the Coliseum in Rome!

In the Middle Ages it was used as a 'strewing' herb to improve the atmosphere at gatherings and festivals, and to the Anglo Saxons it was one of the 'Nine Sacred Herbs' and known as 'Maythen'. In these times it was also used widely in Beer Making as a bittering ingredient, and it was not until hops took over that function in beer-making that it ceased to be used for this purpose.

It was the monks during the middle ages who became the main custodians of herbal knowledge in

Europe collecting and translating ancient works on herbal remedies and developing their own. It was at this time that the 'double headed' variety of *Anthemis nobilis* 'Flora Pleno' is first mentioned, as a milder and less bitter source for tinctures and tisanes and was cultivated in monastery gardens. Flora Pleno is a 'Sport' or mutation of the usual *Anthemis nobilis*, and will occur naturally about once in 10,000 in plants raised from seed. This variety is sterile (does not set seed) and all new plants are cuttings or 'clones' from these rare variations.

It was during the first information revolution – the invention of the printing press in the 17th century – and the increasingly wide availability of books that, the confusion over the precise identity of 'Chamomile' began. The spread of 'Herbals', one frequently copied from another or pieced together from other earlier herbals (Copyright is a relatively modern invention) caused simple errors to be given the authority of print.

Thus it is that particular authors would refer to one or other of the 'Chamomiles' (*Anthemis nobilis* or *Matricaria recutita* respectively) as the 'True' chamomile and the other, if mentioned at all, as an inferior or 'Wild' variety. Often it was simply whichever Chamomile happened to be grown and used in the author's locality that was given the name 'True'.

Ancient History

The Middle Ages

Today

Both *Anthemis nobilis* and *Matricaria recutita* are grown commercially in the 21st century, the reputation of both having been undiminished by the advent of a more rigorous scientific approach in both medicine and cosmetics. On the contrary, the value of naturally derived ingredients for all manner of products has been scientifically proven. Along with the growing popularity of Aromatherapy as an alternative medical treatment, this re-discovery of the value of natural products has been instrumental in stimulating the use of essential oils worldwide. The English Chamomile Company is proud to participate in this expansion and is committed to both refining and improving its world famous 'Pure Steam Distilled Essential Oil of English Chamomile' and to developing new oils and new production techniques in the future.

Egyptian Glass Perfume Amphora

18th Dynasty

height 8.7cm At this time too, probably originating in the East and soon spreading into Western Europe as part of the development of Alchemy, the techniques of distillation were applied to plant materials as

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part of the Alchemist's ongoing investigations into the nature of matter. It was from this era that the idea of 'Essences' developed and the name 'Essential Oil' was applied to the oils derived from aromatic plants by distillation.

Since the days of the Alchemist, the method of extracting essential oil from aromatic herbs has remained in principle, exactly the same process.

Similarly, the variety 'Trenague', which has no flowers at all, was discovered during cultivation, and has since been propagated for use as an aromatic lawn. The monks also noticed the plant's property of being beneficial when planted near ailing or sick plants, often aiding a full recovery. This has given *Anthemis nobilis* the reputation of being 'The Plant's Physician', and studies are currently underway to investigate the causes of this interesting 'virtue'.

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One of the safest medicinal herbs, chamomile is a soothing, gentle relaxant that has been shown to work for a variety of complaints from stress to menstrual cramps. Chamomile has been used for centuries to help relieve infections, stomach gas, stomachaches, and menstrual pain. It is also good for insomnia and promotes healthy skin. This herb has a satisfying, applelike aroma and flavor (the name chamomile is derived from the Greek *kamai melon*, meaning ground apple), and it's most often taken as a delicious, mild therapeutic tea. Concentrated extracts of chamomile are also added to healing creams and lotions or packaged as pills and tinctures.

Every part of the chamomile plant can not be used, only the flowers and the first three to four inches for tea and medicinal uses.

Cut the flowers from the stems with scissors and spread them out on muslin covered racks to dry.

Recipe

Chamomile Cleansing Milk

Must be kept refrigerated.

Good only for 2–4 days.

Place 1 cup of warm milk in a bowl. The milk must be kept warm throughout, however it must never boil and a skin must not form on the milk. The easiest way to accomplish this is by placing the bowl over a saucepan of hot water.

Add 3 tablespoons fresh chamomile flowers. Stir gently from time to time so as not to break up the

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flowers. Infuse until the milk smells strongly of chamomile. Strain into glass jars.

Excellent for oily skin

Recipe

Chamomile Refresco

This refreshing drink, made with chamomile tea, is a cooling thirst quencher on a hot summer's day. If Mexican mint marigold is not available, substitute 2 sprigs of mint and a small stalk of lemongrass cut in 2-inch pieces.

3 chamomile tea bags, or an equal amount of dried chamomile leaves

2 sprigs fresh Mexican mint marigold

2 cups boiling water

1/2 cup orange juice

1 cup pineapple juice

1/4 cup lime juice

1 cup white grape juice

2–1/2 cups chilled sparkling water

1 lime, sliced

In a bowl, pour boiling water over tea and mint marigold (or mint and lemongrass). Cover and steep for

at least 10 minutes.

Strain liquid into a glass pitcher. Stir in orange, pineapple, lime, and grape juices. Chill.

To serve, fill chilled glasses 2/3 full with juice mixture, fill with sparkling water, and add lime slices.

Makes 6 servings.

PER SERVING: 61 CAL (0.1% from fat), 0.5g PROT, 15g CARB, 9mg SOD, 0mg CHOL, 0.2g FIBER

Source: Veggie Life Magazine

Recipe

To prepare a tea to be used as a drink or gargle to help relieve sore throats or stomach aches. You will need:

Two cups hot water

Four teaspoons dried chamomile flowers

Bring water to a boil in medium saucepan. In a quart size pitcher pour flowers in, then pour water over flowers. Stir well. Let stand for ten minutes.

Recipe

Chamomile Wine

Two ounces dried, crushed chamomile flower heads

One quart dry wine

Pour dried flowers into quart of dry wine; let stand for ten days in a well-ventilated area. This wine can be used for digestive problems.

Warning

If you suffer from allergies to plants of the Compositae family (a large group including such flowers as daisies, ragweed, asters and chrysanthemums), you may wish to be cautious about using chamomile at first. While there have been isolated reports of allergic reactions, causing skin rashes and bronchial constriction, most people can use this herb with no problem.

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Herbal Teas – Tasty Or Toxic?

By Doug Smith

Have you visited the tea section of your local grocery store lately? If so, you've seen the dizzying array of herbal tea blends, brands and flavors. There's no doubt that herbal teas are a huge commercial success, and they've been enjoyed for centuries. Many tea lovers buy them for their smell and taste. Others expect herbal teas to be a healthier alternative for other caffeine-containing beverages. Some buy them strictly for the medicinal benefits or effects on the packages.

These claimed medical effects can include calming, soothing, and relaxing. On the other hand, other high-caffeine tea blends may promise increased energy and concentration. Green tea remains a top-seller for its legendary health effects. Is there a dark side to the booming herbal tea business?

Reading The Tea Leaves

In the U.S., the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has the responsibility to evaluate foodstuffs and medications sold to the public. Herbal teas receive very little regulation. Generally, herbal teas fall into a gray area between foods and drugs. Traditionally, the FDA has considered herbal teas taken only for taste and aroma to be classified as foods. Another FDA "rule of thumb" has been that any herb that is safe for consumption in food is therefore assumed to be safe when taken as a tea. However, the FDA has been taking a closer look at herbal teas and their effects.

Are Herbal Teas Toxic?

That's a difficult question to answer, as the FDA is learning. The large majority of commercial herbal tea blends contain multiple ingredients in relatively small concentrations. These teas are quite safe to drink when used according to the product instructions. Problems arise, however, when people prepare their own herbal teas, deliberately concentrate commercial blends, have an allergic reaction to the tea ingredients, or the tea is incompatible with prescription medications.

What's The Problem?

The problem is one of consumer awareness. Many plants and herbs used in teas have specific and measurable medical properties. Caffeine is one of the best examples. It is a naturally occurring ingredient in both tea and coffee plants. Problems are possible when uninformed persons attempt to medicate themselves with teas.

Some Examples

- * Chamomile is reported by some to be both a relaxant and a digestive aid. The chamomile plant is a member of the same plant family as ragweed, asters and chrysanthemums. People allergic to those plants should be cautious of chamomile tea.
- * Comfrey tea has been associated with two reported cases of liver disease in the U.S. In one case, the patient abused the herb by drinking nearly a dozen cups of comfrey tea daily as well as consuming many comfrey pills. This extreme herbal dosage continued for over a year, resulting in the liver ailment.
- * Lobelia tea can cause vomiting, breathing problems, convulsions, and lead to coma and death when used in large amounts.
- * Aromatic sassafras tea in large amounts has caused cancer in lab rats. Oil of sassafras and safrole are the major chemical components of the sassafras oil. These components were banned from root beer decades ago. Although sassafras bark is banned from all food use, extract that contains no safrole is allowed.

Should You Be Scared?

Commercial herbal tea vendors would never willingly endanger you, their customer. Commercially available herbal tea blends are expected to be very safe to drink when prepared according to their directions. Similar to drugs, problems with herbs arise when they are abused or taken in extreme concentrations.

These herbs, even those in commercial herbal teas, can have medicinal effects. Therefore you should always talk to your doctor before using herbal preparations, especially if you use prescription medication. Even if you are not on medication, stop any herb use immediately if you experience unusual symptoms. The symptoms may be an allergy to the herb, or something totally unrelated to the herb. Only your doctor can tell you for sure.

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Discover free home remedies that show you how to use

mayonnaise, duct tape, yogurt, banana peels, soda, mouthwash, peroxide, thread and other common ingredients to cure common but embarrassing conditions.



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