

MINT, APPLE



Mentha suaveolens

[MEN-thuh swah-vee-OH-lens]
(syn *Mentha rotundifolia*)

Family: Labiatae

Names: round-leaved mint, woolly mint

Description: This mint has large fuzzy leaves and stems and a delicate fruity aroma. The fragrance and taste of these herbs often vary depending on growing conditions. Apple mint is one of the tallest mints, often reaching three feet high, while pineapple mint attains about 1 foot with smaller variegated green and cream-colored leaves. It produces white flowers. This perennial species is noticeably pubescent with a branched, upright habit to 1 m high. The shortly stalked or sessile leaves are serrated, hairy above and conspicuously hairy beneath. The leaves when bruised have the combined aroma of spearmint and apples. The white to pink flowers are in terminal tapering spikes in which the flowers' whorls may be distant. These appear during autumn.

Cultivation: A very easily grown plant, it succeeds in most soils and situations so long as the soil is not too dry. Grows well in heavy clay soils. A sunny position is best for production of essential oils, but plants also succeed in partial shade. A very invasive plant, spreading freely at the roots. Unless you have the space to let it roam, it needs to be restrained by some means such as planting it in a container that is buried in the soil. It is said to be a good companion for cabbages and tomatoes, its aromatic leaves repelling insect pests, though its aggressive root system also needs to be taken into account here. Hybridizes freely with other members of this genus. Sow seed spring in a cold frame. Germination is usually fairly quick. Prick out the seedlings into individual pots when they are large enough to handle and plant them out in the summer. Mentha species are very prone to hybridization and so the seed cannot be relied on to breed true. Even without hybridization, seedlings will not be uniform and so the content of medicinal oils etc will vary. When growing plants with a particular aroma it is best to propagate them by division. Division can be easily carried out at almost any time of the year, though it is probably best done in the spring or autumn to allow the plant to establish more quickly. Virtually any part of the root is capable of growing into a new plant. Larger divisions can be planted out direct into their permanent positions. However, for maximum increase it is possible to divide the roots up into sections no more than 3cm long and pot these up in light shade in a cold frame. They will quickly become established and can be planted out in the summer.

History: It is frequently found on the ruins of monasteries, the monks having used it for the

languor following epileptic fits, as it was considered refreshing to the brain.

Properties: Antiseptic; Carminative; Febrifuge.

Medicinal Uses: Round leafed mint, like many other members of this genus, is often used as a domestic herbal remedy, being valued especially for its antiseptic properties and its beneficial effect on the digestion. Like other members of the genus, it is best not used by pregnant women because large doses can cause an abortion. A tea made from the leaves of most mint species has traditionally been used in the treatment of fevers, headaches, digestive disorders and various minor ailments. The leaves are harvested as the plant comes into flower and can be dried for later use. The essential oil in the leaves is antiseptic, though it is toxic in large doses.

Culinary Uses: The light apple and mint flavor of this mint make it a popular culinary herb for use in drinks, sauces, jellies and fruit, meat and poultry dishes. The leaves can be eaten raw or cooked as a potherb. They are used as a flavoring in salads or cooked foods. The leaves have a similar flavor to spearmint, and are considered to be superior in flavor to that species but are also hairy, which makes them less suitable for garnishing. A herb tea is made from the leaves.

Other Uses: An essential oil is obtained from the whole plant. Rats and mice intensely dislike the smell of mint. The plant was therefore used in homes as a strewing herb and has also been spread in granaries to keep the rodents off the grain.

Recipes:

Apple Mint and Pink Grapefruit Fool

1 lb tart apples, peeled and sliced
8 oz pink grapefruit segments
3 Tbsp clear honey
2 Tbsp water
6 large sprigs apple mint, plus more to garnish
2/3 cup double cream

1 ¼ cups custard

Place the apples, grapefruit, honey, water and apple mint in a pan, cover and simmer for 10 minutes until soft. Leave in the pan to cool, then discard the apple mint. Purée the mixture in a food processor. Whip the double cream until it forms soft peaks, and fold into the custard, keeping 2 Tbsp to decorate. Carefully fold the cream into the apple and grapefruit mixture. Serve in individual glasses, chilled and decorated with swirls of cream and small sprigs of apple mint. (Herbal Pleasures: Cooking and Crafts)

Applemint Angel Food Cake

1 cup pastry flour
2 Tbsp cornstarch
5 large egg whites
2/3 cup sugar
grated rind of half a lime
1 Tbsp finely chopped apple mint

Preheat oven to 350F. Line the base of an angel food pan with nonstick baking paper, but do not grease the pan. Sift the flour and cornstarch with 1 Tbsp of the sugar. Whisk the egg whites until stiff, then add the rest of the sugar gradually, whisking until the mixture is very thick. Fold in the flour, grated rind, and mint. Turn into the pan and bake 35-40 minutes. Invert the cake, in the pan, onto a wire rack to cool, but do not unmold until cold. Serve sprinkled with confectioner's sugar. The cake should be eaten soon after baking, as it does not keep well. (At Home with Herbs)

Apple Mint Pudding

2 cups milk
¾ cup sugar
2 Tbsp cornstarch
¼ tsp salt
2 egg yolks, beaten
2 Tbsp butter
1 tsp pure vanilla extract
1 tsp apple mint, finely minced
sprigs of fresh mint, for garnish

Combine the milk, sugar, cornstarch, and salt in a medium saucepan. Stir to blend well. Cook the mixture over medium-low heat, stirring all the time, until it is thick. Remove

from the heat and cool slightly. Spoon a small amount of the hot pudding mixture into the beaten egg yolks and stir. Pour the egg mixture into the pudding mixture, and cook for 2 minutes. Remove from the heat. Add the butter, vanilla and mint; stir. Pour into individual dessert dishes. Cool, and serve with a sprig of mint. (Beautiful Easy Herbs)

Strawberry-Apple Mint Pie

1 9-inch baked pie shell
1 cup strawberries, crushed
2 medium apples, chopped
2 Tbsp finely chopped apple mint
1 cup water
1 cup sugar
red coloring
additional whole berries

Wash and hull berries; crush enough to make 1 cup. Reserve 6 or 8 berries of equal size for garnish and small ones to cover pie bottom. Pare and chop apples. In water in a saucepan dissolve sugar and add fruits and mint. Bring to a boil then cook over low heat 5 minutes. Test for thickening, and when juice drops thickly off a spoon, remove from heat, stir in coloring and cool for a few minutes. Arrange a layer of reserved berries over bottom of a pie shell and pour warm mixture over them. Cool. As pie begins to set, place a berry on top for each serving, equidistant from each other and about halfway out from center. Whipped cream may be piped around berries or decorate the top as desired. (Growing Herbs in Pots)

Apple Ale

½ cup sugar
1 cup water
18 sprigs apple mint
4 lemons
1 quart ginger ale

Boil sugar and water until sugar is dissolved. Remove from heat and add 10 sprigs apple mint. Chill. Add the juice of 4 lemons and strain. After filling mint julep glasses with crushed ice, add ½ cup apple ale and fill to top with ginger ale. Add sprig of apple mint and serve. (Spices and Herbs)

References:

The Book of Mint, Denise Greig, Kangaroo Press, 1989; ISBN: 0-86417-220-6
Plants for a Future Database

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