

MINT, CORN



Mentha arvensis
[MEN-thuh ar-VEN-sis]

Family: Labiatae

Names: American Wild Mint, Betch Di Coq, Brook Mint, Canadian Mint, Fan Ho, Field Mint, Ginger Mint, Golden Apple Mint, Japanese field mint, Field mint, North American Corn Mint, North American Field Mint, Po Ho, Brook Mint Poleo, Wild Mint; poleo mint, Indian mint, wild mint, horse mint, hakka (Japanese); pakha (Korean); bo he (Chinese); Ablebana (If); hierba buena, yerba buena (Spanish.); marsh mint.

Description: A typical mint family member with square stems, leaves in pairs, with a creeping rootstalk the main form of propagation. In some ways the most distinctive and delicious smelling of all the mints, the scent a cross between peppermint and

pennyroyal. The leaves are slightly notched, frequently downy, and compared to the more common mints, relatively smooth leaved. The plant is light green in sunny areas and darker in shade, the height varies from less than a foot to as tall as three or four feet. The plant does not flower in terminal spikes as other mints but in the axils of the upper leaves, the flowers usually light pink to lavender. Unlike other mints, corn mint frequently branches, particularly in late summer or in drier seasons, often a dozen or more times. It is rather fragile. It is hardy to zone 4 and is not frost tender. It is in flower from May to October, and the seeds ripen from July to October. The scented flowers are hermaphrodite and are pollinated by bees. It is noted for attracting wildlife.

Cultivation: An easily grown plant, it succeeds in most soils and situations so long as the soil is not too dry. This species tolerates much drier conditions than other members of the genus. Prefers a slightly acid soil. Grows well in heavy clay soils. A sunny position is best for production of essential oils, but it also succeeds in partial shade. Plants are hardy to at least 17°F. Most mints have fairly aggressive spreading roots and, unless you have the space to let them roam, they need to be restrained by some means such as planting them in containers that are buried in the soil. Hybridizes freely with other members of this genus. Polymorphic. The flowers are very attractive to bees and butterflies. A good companion plant for growing near brassicas and tomatoes, helping to deter insect pests. Members of this genus are rarely if ever troubled by browsing deer.

Sow seed in 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. The leaves are harvested as the plant comes into flower and can be dried for later use.

History: Mint was an important herb in the humoral medicine of old Europe. Considered to be “hot and dry,” it was recommended for “phlegmatic” illnesses, that is, cold, damp ones. Its hot and dry nature may have been a consequence of its origin. Theophrastus tells that Hades, the god of the underworld, emerged one day into the air where he attempted to ravage the nymph Minthe. Persephone, Hades spouse, stumbled upon the scene and saved the nymph’s honor by turning her into the sweet herb.

Properties: Anaesthetic; Antiphlogistic; Antiseptic; Antispasmodic; Aromatic; Cancer; Carminative; Diaphoretic; Emmenagogue; Febrifuge; Galactofuge; Salve; Stimulant; Stomachic.

Constituents: terpene (pulegone); menthol

Medicinal Uses: Corn 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 has traditionally been used in the treatment of fevers, headaches, digestive disorders and various minor ailments. The leaves are a classical remedy for stomach cancer. The Chinese use *bo he* as a cooling remedy for head colds and influenza and also for some types of headaches, sore throats, and eye inflammations. As a liver stimulant, it is added to remedies for digestive disorders or liver qi (energy) stagnation). It disperses wind-heat: for patterns of wind-heat with fever, headache and cough; clears the head and eyes and benefits the throat: for patterns of wind-heat with sore throat, red eyes, and headache; vents rashes: used in the early stages of rashes such as measles to induce the rash to come to the surface and thereby speed recovery. A stomach anesthetic and tonic, useful for colic, indigestion and dizziness that relates to indigestion. A tablespoon or less can be steeped in a cup of water and sipped slowly. Makes an excellent sun tea, brewed either fresh or dried. It makes an excellent and delicious after dinner tea as well as an aperitif in a jigger of brandy or white wine when appetite or digestion seems a bit off. It can also be used to stimulate scanty or delayed menstruation, particularly if accompanied by a bloated sensation or painful cramps.

Toxicity: the oil is non-toxic, non-irritant (except in concentrations, may cause sensitization in some individuals.

Aromatherapy:

Extraction: Essential oil by steam distillation from the flowering herb. The oil is usually dementholized since it contains so much menthol that it is otherwise solid at room temperature

Characteristics: Dementholized oil: a colorless or pale yellow liquid with a strong, fresh, bitter-sweet minty odor, somewhat like peppermint

Actions: anesthetic, antimicrobial, antiseptic, antispasmodic, carminative, cytotoxic, digestive, expectorant, stimulant, stomachic

Constituents: menthol, menthone, pinene, menthyl acetate, isomenthone, thujone, phellandrene, piperitone and menthofuran.

Uses:

Used in some pharmaceutical preparations, such as cough lozenges, herb teas and syrups, mainly in the form of menthol. Extensively employed in soaps, toothpastes, detergents, cosmetics, perfumes and especially industrial fragrances. Used by the food industry especially for flavoring confectionery, liqueurs, and chewing gum.

Other Uses: The plant is used as an insect repellent. 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. The leaves also repel various insects.

Culinary Uses: The leaves have a reasonably strong minty flavor with a slight bitterness, they are used as a flavoring in salads or cooked foods. A herb tea is made from the fresh or dried leaves. The fresh leaves make an excellent liner for cake tins in place of grease and impart a delightful flavor to light cakes, especially pound cake and angel food cake.

Recipes:

Peas and Lettuce with Corn Mint

½ oz butter
4 or 5 large outer leaves of lettuce, washed but not dried
1 small onion, finely chopped
1 lb fresh or frozen peas
1 tsp sugar
3 or 4 sprigs of corn mint, chopped
salt and pepper

Grease the bottom of a pan with the butter. Shred the lettuce finely. Put some of the lettuce in the bottom of the pan, sprinkle with a little of the onion, then put in some peas, seasoning, a few grains of sugar and some

chopped mint. Continue to fill the pan with the ingredients until all are used up. Do not add water. Cover and put on a low heat. Shake the pan from time to time to prevent sticking. The vegetable is ready when the peas are cooked and the lettuce has simmered down into a soft purée with the mint and onion. Delicious with lamb chops. (Food from the Countryside)

Eccles Cakes with Corn Mint

8 oz flour
½ tsp salt
2 oz lard
2 oz melted butter or margarine
4 oz brown sugar
5 oz currants
grated rind of 1 small lemon
2 Tbsp corn mint leaves, finely chopped

Preheat oven to 450F. Sift flour and salt together and rub in the lard and butter until the mixture resembles breadcrumbs. Lightly mix in enough cold water to form a stiff dough. Roll out on a floured board to 1/8 inch thick. Using a 4-inch cutter cut the pastry into rounds. Mix together the rest of the ingredients. Put 2 or 3 tsp on each pastry round. Brush edges with water and press together to enclose the filling. Turn each cake over and flatten with a rolling pin. Cut 2 slits in the top of each, sprinkle with caster sugar and bake for 15-20 minutes until pale brown. (Food from the Countryside)

References:

Food From the Countryside, Avril Rodway, Grange Books, 1988; 1-85627-276-1
Geraniums for the Iroquois, Daniel E. Moerman, Reference Publications, 1981; ISBN: 0-917256-17-4
Medicinal Plants of the Mountain West, Michael Moore, Museum of New Mexico Press, 1979; ISBN: 0-89013-104-X
Plants for a Future Database

Resources:

Companion Plants, www.companionplants.com
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