

## MINT, EAU DE COLOGNE



*Mentha x piperita citrata*  
[MEN-tha x pie-per-EYE-tah]

**Family:** Labiatae

**Names:** Bergamot Mint, Horsemint, Lemon Mint, Lime Mint, Orange Mint, Pineapple Mint, Su Nanesi, Water Capitate Mint, Water Mint, Watermunt, Wild Water Mint, Orangenminze 'Citrata' (German)

**Description:** Very aromatic decumbent, glabrous perennial from 30-60 cm tall, onoverground leafy stolons. Stems branched, bearing dark green, purple-tinged, smooth, ovate or elliptic, petiolate leaves 1.5-4 cm long. Mauve flowers in rounded dense terminal spikes or in upper leaf axils, appearing from mid to late autumn. The aroma is variously described as lemon, orange, bergamot, lavender

and eau de cologne mint. The whole plant has a strong minty aroma with a hint of ginger. It is hardy to zone 3 and is not frost tender. It is in flower from August to October. The scented flowers are hermaphrodite and are pollinated by insects.

**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 the production of essential oils, but the plant also succeeds in partial shade. Prefers a slightly acid soil. Plants are very tolerant of neglect, succeeding in long grass. Hybridizes freely with other members of this genus. 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. The plant produces a better quality essential oil if the plant is grown in dry ground. 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.

**Properties:** Anodyne; Antiseptic; Antispasmodic; Carminative; Cholagogue; Diaphoretic; Refrigerant; Stomachic; Tonic; Vasodilator.

**Medicinal Uses:** Eau de Cologne 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 medicinal uses of this herb are more akin to lavender (*Lavandula* spp) than the mints. It is used to treat infertility, rapid heartbeat, nervous exhaustion etc.

**Culinary Uses:** Leaves are eaten raw or cooked. Used sparingly in tisanes, jellies, cold drinks or salads. A very pungent flavor, the leaves of the true eau-de-cologne mint are too aromatic for most tastes, though the cultivar 'Basil' has an excellent flavor and makes a very good substitute for basil in pesto. An herb tea is made from the fresh or dried leaves. The essential oil in the leaves is antiseptic, though it is toxic in large doses.

**Other Uses:** An essential oil obtained from the whole plant is a source of lavender oil which is used in perfumery. It is also used in oral hygiene preparations, toiletries etc. Formerly used as a strewing herb, the plant repels insects, rats etc. 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.

## References: Plants for a Future Database

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