

JAPANESE MINT



Mentha arvensis x piperascens

Family: Labiatae

Names: Canadian Mint, Japanese Peppermint, North American Corn Mint, North American Field Mint; Japansk Mynte (Danish); Japonska mieta polna (Polish)

Description: This is a tall, downy, more vigorous variety of mint and in general has narrower leaves with a more pronounced serration.

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 5°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. Seed - sow 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. This can be grown in a boggy area or in a pot as a water plant.

History: It is valuable commercially because of its high oil yield and the high menthol content of its oil for which it is especially grown in Japan and other countries such as China and Paraguay. The Japanese have used this mint for more than two centuries. They once carried dried and pulverized leaves in small silver boxes hanging from their girdles.

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

Medicinal Uses: Japanese 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. 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. It is said to relieve hay fever symptoms within minutes. The essential oil in the leaves is antiseptic, though can be toxic in large doses.

Culinary Uses: The leaves can be eaten raw or cooked and are used as a flavoring in salads or cooked foods. They have a strong taste of peppermint. A herb tea is made from the fresh or dried leaves. This mint is a source of Japanese menthol, used to flavor candies, drinks, etc. An essential oil from the plant is used as a flavoring in sweets and beverages. The leaves contain about 0.2% essential oil.

Toxicity: Like other members of the genus, it is best not used by pregnant women because large doses can cause an abortion.

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. An essential oil is obtained from the plant. It can be used as a substitute for, or

adulterant of, peppermint oil. Yields of up to 1.6% have been obtained.

References:

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

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