

## MAORI MINT



### *Mentha diemenica*

**Family:** Labiatae

**Description:** Widespread and native to New Zealand. It is a prostrate, wiry perennial with branches up to 25 cm long, often covered in a short dense down. The entire, sessile or shortly stalked leaves are oblong to ovate and up to 12 mm long. The plant has an unmistakable peppermint odor. The white flowers may be solitary or in small clusters of 2-3 flowers on pubescent stalks up to 4 mm long.

**Cultivation:** It grows well in a slightly damp site in either reasonably heavy shade or full sun. In good conditions in a rockery it may become invasive and thus should be contained in a rock pocket or regularly controlled by removing suckers. It is a desirable plant between drive strips or near stepping stones where its fragrant aroma is noticed when it is trodden on. Propagation is easy from cuttings

taken at any time when the plant is growing vigorously, or by division when rooted pieces may be removed and re-established in a new situation. These new plants must be kept moist after transplanting. It is frost hardy, but it is susceptible to a rust fungus causing small brown spots on the underside of the leaves. This may be controlled with a suitable fungicide.

**Properties:** Antiseptic; Carminative;  
Diaphoretic; Diuretic; Emmenagogue;  
Stomachic.

**Medicinal Uses:** 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. A decoction of this plant was used occasionally to induce sweating.

**Culinary Uses:** The leaves of this native mint may be used as a flavoring and garnish for cool summer drinks in a similar manner to the common introduced mint.

**Other Uses:** An essential oil is obtained from the whole plant. The plant is used as a strewing herb for repelling insects. 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:**

The Book of Mint, Denise Greig, Kangaroo Press, 1989; ISBN: 0-86417-220-6  
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