

## HYSSOP



### *Hyssop officinalis*

[hiss-OP-us oh-fiss-ih-NAH-liss]

**Family:** Lamiaceae

**Names:** azob; Ysop, Joseph, Kirchenseppl, Isop, Echter Ysop (German); hysope, m Herbe sacré (French); issopo, ossopo (Italian); Hinojo (Spanish); Hyssop, Ipse, Paddekruid, Ysop (Dutch); Harilik iisop (Estonian); Iisoppi (Finnish); Isop (Gaelic); Izsóp (Hungarian); Isópur (Icelandic); Isop (Norwegian); Hyzop lekarski, Hyzop, jozefek (Polish); Isop (Romanian); Issop (Russian); Isop (Swedish); Cördük otu (Turkish)

**Description:** Small, greyish bush with a height of 2 feet and width of 18 inches. An evergreen herb native to the Mediterranean. Flowers can be blue, pink or white, ½ inch, whorls on one side on stem. The leaves are soft and usually hairy, almost grey with blooms from June to October. The new stems are square, rounding off as they flower.

**Cultivation:** Perennial to zone 3-4. Germination is 7-10 days. Spacing of 12-18 inches. Soil temperature from 60-70F. Soil should be well drained, dry with a pH of 7.5-8.5. Prefers full sun or light shade. Hyssop can be propagated in several ways. It's easy to grow from seed. Sow the seeds indoors about six weeks before the last frost date in spring, then transplant them into the garden when sprouts are 2-3 inches high. Plant two or three seedlings in a cluster. Hyssop grows well in dry, rocky, limestone soils. Light, well-drained soils are recommended. Older plants need to be provided with nitrogen-containing fertilizers for good productivity in the amount of about 25-50 pounds per acre.. In cultivation, hyssop may have a life span of 7-9 years.

In the first year, hyssop will grow to about 12-15 inches and produce just a few flowers, but the growth pattern will be much stronger and bushier in the second season. After the second year, it's a good idea to keep the bush trimmed and shaped or it will become somewhat shabby. It is so hardy that even in the North it lasts well into the winter with its almost evergreen foliage, permitting harvest of leaves and sprigs often through Christmas. If you allow the plant to blossom, be sure to harvest the blooms before they have opened fully. Cut flowering stems in the morning and hang in bunches in a dry, shady place, or spread

out on sheets of paper or on drying racks. When moisture-free, strip the flowers and some leaves from their stalks and store in airtight containers. Yields (fresh weight) of hyssop are generally 1,500 to 3,000 pounds per acre (2.0-3.0 t/ha in the first year and 6.0-10.0 t/ha in subsequent years, with an essential oil yield of 8-15 kg/ha). Can also be grown by root division or cuttings. Very effective as a small hedge in a formal herb garden. Grow near cabbages to lure away cabbage-white butterflies. Plant near vines to increase yield. Hyssop is usually sold dry. The tops are 75-80% water and dry in 5-10 days. You should turn them once or twice to avoid matting together.

**History:** The Greek word for the genus, *hyssopos*, may derive from the Hebrew *ezob* or *azob* meaning a sacred plant. Although hyssop is mentioned in the Bible, it probably does not refer to this herb but to a form of wild marjoram or oregano since hyssop doesn't grow wild in Palestine. However, research now favors common hyssop once again, with the discovery that the mold that produces penicillin grows on its leaf. This could have acted as an antibiotic protection when lepers were bathed in hyssop. The Romans are said to have introduced hyssop wherever they settled, valuing it as both a ceremonial and healing plant. Hyssop has an ancient medical reputation and was used for purifying sacred places and employed as a strewing herb. It is used principally for respiratory and digestive complaints, and externally for rheumatism, bruises, sores, earache and toothache. It is also used to regulate the blood pressure, as a general nerve tonic, and for states of anxiety or hysteria. It is current in the British Herbal Pharmacopoeia as a specific for bronchitis and the common cold. Because of the strong aroma of the leaves, European women supposedly pressed them in the pages of their prayer books to keep them awake during services. Romans used it as a base for an herbal wine and in the Victorian language of

flowers, hyssop means cleanliness. Early settlers brought it to America for its medicinal qualities. Today it has naturalized from Quebec west to Montana and as far south as North Carolina.

**Properties:** astringent, antiseptic, antispasmodic, antiviral, bactericidal, carminative, cephalic, cicatrizant, digestive, diuretic, emmenagogue, expectorant, febrifuge, hypertensive, nervine, sedative, sudorific, tonic (heart and circulation), vermifuge, vulnerary.

**Constituents:** pinocamphone, isopinocamphone, estragole, borneol, geraniol, limonene, thujone, camphene, pinocampheol, cineole, linalool, terpineol, myrcene, caryophyllene, flavonoids (hyssopin), tannin (5-8%); organic acid; bitter lactones (marrubiin, ursolic acid).

**Character/Energetics:** bitter, pungent, dry, slightly warming. Meridians: lung, stomach, colon, bladder.

**Ritual Uses:** Gender: Hot; Planet: Jupiter; Element: Fire; Part Used: The Herb; Basic Powers: Purification, Protection; Specific Uses: add to purification bath sachets of all types, protection sachets and incenses. Hyssop was a holy herb of the ancient Greeks, used to cleanse sacred spaces. Hyssop can be burned as incense, worn, used in decorations and added to the chalice. Use a bunch to ritually "sweep" the altar as a preparation for a ceremonial rite. Grow hyssop around the home to repel thieves

**Medicinal Uses:** The flowering tops and the leaves are tonic and stomachic. Hyssop contains marrubiin, also found in horehound. It's an expectorant, used to treat lung conditions, specifically bronchitis, especially where there is excessive mucus production. Hyssop appears to encourage the production of a more liquid mucus, and at the same time gently stimulates expectoration. This combined action clears thick and congested phlegm.

Hyssop can irritate the mucous membranes, so it is best given after an infection has peaked, when the herb's tonic action encourages a general recovery. Hyssop also contains ursolic acid, which reduces inflammation, so the tea makes a good sore throat gargle. Studies also show it to be an antiviral that is especially effective against the herpes simplex virus. It is included in some flu and cold remedies to reduce congestion and fevers. As a sedative, hyssop is a useful remedy against asthma in both children and adults, especially where the condition is exacerbated by mucus congestion. Like many herbs with a strong volatile oil, it soothes the digestive tract and can be an effective remedy against indigestion, gas, bloating, and colic. An old country remedy for rheumatism was made from the fresh green tops brewed into a tea and taken several times a day. When hyssop flowers are blended with valerian root, chamomile flowers, a few peppermint leaves, and a pinch of lavender flowers, the mixture makes a powerful sedative tea on going to bed. A wash made from the leaves and applied to cuts and bruises is antiseptic and healing. The leaves were soaked in oil and applied to the head to kill lice. Special application for adders' sting was a compress of bruised hyssop leaves mixed with honey, salt, and cumin seeds. Experimental extracts have shown promise against herpes simplex. The green tops of the herb can be added to soups to benefit asthmatics. Hyssop baths are useful for rheumatic complaints. Make a standard infusion of the herb using two teaspoons per cup of water and steeping for twenty minutes. The dose is one-fourth cup four times a day.

Hyssop tea contains a compound called MAR-10. Studies have shown that in test tubes, this compound inhibits HIV replication with no toxicity to healthy cells. The researchers who discovered this effect speculate that hyssop might be useful in treating people with HIV. Try mixing a few teaspoons of the dried herb into teas.

**USES:**

**Infusion:** Drink hot during the early stages of colds and influenza. Also take for digestive upsets and nervous stomach

**Tincture:** Combine with other expectorant herbs, such as licorice, elecampane, and anise, for bronchitis and stubborn coughs

**Syrup:** for coughs, use a syrup made from an infusion of either the aerial parts or the flowers. Combine with mullein flowers or licorice for stubborn coughs and lung weakness

**RECIPES:**

*Riversong Sore Throat Tea*

2 Tbsp chopped dried ginger

¼ cup dried peppermint

¼ cup dried sweet cicely

¼ cup dried hyssop

Combine all ingredients, place in a dark jar with lid and store in a cool, dark place. Place 1 Tbsp per cup of the herbal mixture in a teapot, pour boiling water over and put the lid on the pot and stopper in the spout. Allow to steep for 10 minutes. Strain into cup. Add honey if desired.

**To Regulate Blood Pressure:** prepare a tea from leaves and stems of hyssop. Place a handful of chopped material in 1 pint of boiling water. Steep 10 minutes. Strain and sweeten with honey. Drink twice daily.

**Poultice to Use for Black Eyes:** Place a handful of chopped leaves and stems of hyssop in 2 cups of boiling water. Allow to steep for 30 minutes. Strain and dip clean cloth in herb liquid and apply to black eye.

**Aromatherapy Uses:**

**CHARACTER:** Yang

**EXTRACTION:** essential oil by steam distillation from the leaves and flowering tops

**CHARACTERISTICS:** a colorless to pale yellowy-green liquid with a sweet, camphoraceous top note and warm spicy-herbaceous undertone.

**BLENDS WELL WITH:** lavender, rosemary, myrtle, bay leaf, sage, clary sage, geranium,

eucalyptus, myrtle, camphor, juniper, cajeput, laurel and citrus oils

**USES:**

For skin: bruises, cuts, dermatitis, eczema, inflammation, wounds

Circulation, Muscles and Joints: low or high blood pressure, rheumatism

Respiratory System: asthma, bronchitis, catarrh, cough, sore throat, tonsillitis, whooping cough

Digestive System: colic, indigestion

Genito-urinary system: amenorrhea, leucorrhea

Immune System: colds, flu

Mind and spirit: provides clarity, increases concentration; stimulates creativity; mental stimulant

Nervous system: anxiety, fatigue, nervous tension and stress-related conditions.

The essential oil of hyssop has warming properties that help calm strong feelings and increase awareness. It is ideal for people involved in creative work. Added to a sitz bath, hyssop stimulates menstruation.

**BLENDS:** Anti-Sorrow fragrance: 4 oz sweet almond oil, 10 drops marjoram oil, 5 drops each clary sage and cypress or rosemary oil, 1 drop hyssop oil, 1 drop melissa. Combine.

Circulatory: 4 drops hyssop, 3 drops ylang-ylang, 3 drops rose

Respiratory: 4 drops hyssop, 3 drops sandalwood, 3 drops cajeput

Skin: 4 drops hyssop, 4 drops myrrh, 2 drops cypress

Hypertension: 5 drops hyssop, 10 drops marjoram, 15 drops geranium. Diluted in 2 Tbsp vegetable oil

Breathing difficulties: 15 drops benzoin, 5 drops geranium, 10 drops hyssop. Diluted in 2 Tbsp vegetable oil

**Toxicity:** Use only in small doses medicinally. Pregnant women and people with high blood pressure should avoid it. Epileptics should not use the essential oil at all.

**Culinary Uses:** Widely used in the Middle East and parts of Europe, hyssop is good with lamb and rabbit. Garnish all fat fish sparingly

with freshly minced leaves. Lightly sprinkle ½ tsp minced herb over wild duck and pheasant before roasting; One half teaspoon minced hyssop cuts grease in all fat meats. For fruit and sweet pies such as apricot and peach, sprinkle ¼ teaspoon dried hyssop over fruit before covering pie with top crust. Sprinkle ½ teaspoon freshly minced herb over vegetables before tossing. Add ½ teaspoon minced herb to ingredients of sweet vegetable soups while cooking. In England, it's a traditional herb to use with cranberries. Add hyssop to fruit cups, pies and drinks. It's one of the fresh herbs that get stronger as it cooks, so add it late in the cooking of stews and soups. Flavor is often too strong for most modern tastes. The tips boiled in soup were eaten by asthmatics. It is one of the herbs in Chartreuse liqueur and a French honey is famous for its hyssop flavor.

**Recipes:**

**Avocado and Papaya Salad with Hyssop Vinaigrette**

1 small head Nappa cabbage

1 papaya

1 avocado

1 tsp hyssop flowers, finely chopped

Shred Nappa cabbage and set aside. Peel and cut papaya into crescent slices, saving the rind. Set sliced papaya aside. Over a bowl, squeeze the papaya rind to express any extra juice. With a whisk, incorporate the juice into the Hyssop Vinaigrette. Pit and cut avocado into crescents and set aside. In a salad bowl, toss the cabbage with 2/3 of the vinaigrette. Divide cabbage among 4 salad plates. Arrange both avocado and papaya slices artfully atop the cabbage. Spoon the remaining vinaigrette over the papaya and avocado. Garnish with hyssop florets and serve.

*Hyssop Vinaigrette*

2 Tbsp white wine vinegar

5 tsp canola oil

1 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil

1 tsp hyssop flowers, finely chopped  
salt and white pepper

In a bowl, pour in white wine vinegar, then whisk in canola oil and extra virgin olive oil until emulsified. Add hyssop flowers, and salt and pepper to taste. (Edible Flowers from Garden to Palate)

### **Hyssop Chicken for Sadness**

1 chicken (4-5 lbs)  
1 cup bread crumbs  
½ cup chopped onion  
1 Tbsp chopped fresh hyssop  
¼ tsp or slightly less of salt  
plenty of pepper  
4 carrots, chopped  
½ lb string beans, each snapped in two  
10 whole shallots, peeled  
4 potatoes, peeled and cut in quarters  
1 cup strong chicken stock  
1 cup dry red wine  
¼ cup cream, optional

Stuff the chicken with a dressing of the bread crumbs, onion, hyssop, and seasonings. Place the chicken in the bottom of a Dutch oven or large covered pot. Cook, uncovered, in a 400F oven for 10 minutes. Turn down the heat to 325 and cook for 1 hour. Remove the Dutch oven from the oven, lift the chicken out, and layer the vegetables in. Replace the chicken. Pour in the chicken stock and wine. Cook another 1 ½ hours. Remove from the heat. Cool, then carve the chicken. Arrange the chicken and vegetables on a large platter. Reduce the pan juices to a thin gravy. Adjust seasoning. Add the cream, if desired. Pass the gray with the chicken and stuffing. (The Herbal Epicure)

### **Zucchini Hyssop Soup**

1 medium onion, chopped  
1 Tbsp butter  
4-6 medium zucchini, sliced  
1 large potato, peeled and diced  
¼ tsp thyme  
¼ tsp basil  
6 cups chicken broth  
1 cup milk  
¼ cup hyssop blossoms

salt and pepper to taste

In a large frypan, sauté onion in hot butter. Add zucchini, potato, herbs, salt and pepper. After mixture is hot, cook 3 minutes; stir occasionally. Add broth; simmer 15 minutes. Add ilk and hyssop blossoms; simmer for 5 minutes. (Edible Flowers: A Recipe Collection)

### **Hyssop Stuffed Pork**

1 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil  
2 shallots, finely chopped  
1 stalk celery, finely chopped  
2 mushrooms, finely chopped  
¾ cup chicken broth  
1 Tbsp hyssop flowers, finely chopped  
1 ½ cup fresh bread crumbs  
4 thick-cut pork chops, cut in half up to the bone.

Preheat oven to 375F. Heat oil in a skillet. Add shallots, celery, mushrooms and sauté for 4 minutes, stirring frequently. Add chicken broth and hyssop flowers. Remove from heat. Toss in bread crumbs, until evenly moistened. Stuff pork chops. Heat skillet. Add pork chops and sear both sides. Place chops in a shallow baking pan and bake for 20-30 minutes, or until done. (Edible Flowers from Garden to Palate)

### **Orange Chicken and Early Summer Greens** Marinade:

2/3 cup orange juice  
¼ cup lemon juice  
¼ cup honey  
4 cloves garlic, minced  
1 Tbsp chopped lemon thyme  
1 Tbsp chopped hyssop  
2 tsp grated orange peel  
6 boneless chicken breasts, skin removed

Mix all marinade ingredients together in 1 13x9x2" baking dish. Add chicken breasts and turn to coat. Cover and chill overnight, turning occasionally.

Dressing:

6 Tbsp safflower oil  
¼ cup white wine vinegar

¼ cup orange juice  
½ onion, chopped

Combine dressing ingredients in a clean jar with a lid. Shake and set aside.

To Assemble:

Wash and dry greens and place in a large bowl with orange segments. Toss with dressing and refrigerate until ready to assemble. Remove chicken from pan and pour marinade into small saucepan. Grill chicken on barbecue or under broiler in oven, about 4 minutes per side, until cooked through. Remove from grill and set aside. Meanwhile, boil reserved marinade until reduced to about ¼ cup about 10 minutes. Arrange greens on the center of a large platter. Garnish with calendula and chive petals. Cut orange chicken diagonally into ½” thick slices and arrange around outside of platter. Drizzle warm marinade over chicken. Serve immediately.

Greens:

1 cup French sorrel  
1 cup buttercrunch or Boston lettuce  
½ cup dandelion or borage leaves  
3 oranges, peel and white pith removed, cut into segments  
¼ cup calendula petals or nasturtium flowers for garnish  
2 Tbsp chopped chive flowers for garnish  
(Recipes from Riversong)

### **Meat Balls with Hyssop**

6 oz lean ground beef  
6 oz sausage out of casing  
1 large onion  
2 large cloves garlic  
1 ½ Tbsp chopped parsley  
1 ½ Tbsp chopped hyssop  
1 tsp chopped marjoram  
1 large egg  
salt and pepper  
3 oz sesame seeds  
oil for frying

Peel and quarter the onion and mince it. Mixed with the meats. In a bowl add the crushed garlic, the finely chopped herbs, a seasoning of salt and plenty of freshly milled

black pepper to the meat mixture. Mash all together with a wooden spoon until the mixture is really pasty. Then add the egg and again mix thoroughly. The mixture should be rather soft and wet. Form the meat mixture into walnut-sized balls and roll in sesame seeds until they are evenly coated. Pour the cooking oil into a deep frying pan, so that it is about ½ in deep and heat until very hot. Quickly fry the meat balls for about 5 minutes, turning them to brown on all sides. (All Good Things Around Us)

### **Pears Poached in White Wine with Hyssop**

2 cups Gewurztraminer wine  
1/3 cup honey  
one 3-inch cinnamon stick  
2 whole cloves  
4 3-inch fresh hyssop sprigs  
4 lemon slices  
4 ripe but firm pears with stems, such as Bartlett, Anjou, or Bosc  
3 Tbsp green Chartreuse  
3 Tbsp nonfat or low-fat vanilla yogurt  
fresh hyssop flowers

In a medium-size saucepan, combine the wine, honey, cinnamon, cloves, hyssop sprigs, and lemon slices. Bring to a boil over high heat and cook for 5 minutes. While the poaching liquid is cooking, carefully peel the pears, leaving the stems intact. If necessary, cut a small slice off the bottom so the pears will stand upright. Stand the pears up in the poaching liquid, cover, and reduce the heat to low so the liquid simmers. Cook until the pears can be pierced easily with a toothpick, about 10 minutes. Remove with a slotted spoon and place in individual bowls or goblets. Remove the cinnamon, cloves, hyssop, and lemon slices and discard. Add the Chartreuse, increase the heat to medium-high, and boil the syrup until reduced by half. Let cool slightly, then add the yogurt. Pour the sauce around the pears. Serve warm or chilled, garnished with fresh hyssop flowers. (Recipes from an American Herb Garden.)

### **Roast Duck with a Sauce of Morello Cherries and Hyssop**

1 duckling, dressed weight 4-5 lb  
1 onion, quartered  
salt  
5 Tbsp Cotes du Rhone wine  
4 cups ripe morello cherries, pitted  
juice of 1 orange  
1/3 cup light brown sugar  
4 sprigs of hyssop  
1 tsp arrowroot  
1 Tbsp eau-de-vie de cerises, cherry brandy or cold water  
1 pinch of ground allspice  
2 Tbsp butter  
cherries and/or sprigs of hyssop to garnish

Remove the giblets from the duck and place the onion inside the body cavity. Pat the duck skin dry with paper towels and rub in some salt. Place the duck on a rack in a roasting pan and put the giblets in the bottom of the pan. Roast the duck in a preheated 375F oven for 1-1 ¼ hours or until cooked. During the cooking, pour off the surplus fat occasionally and reserve it for other cooking, particularly potato dishes. When the duck is cooked, transfer it to a serving dish and keep warm in a low oven until ready to serve. Pour off all surplus fat from the roasting pan and add the wine. Cook over high heat for 4 minutes, stirring to incorporate the cooking juices and sediments from the duck. Strain the liquid into a cup and keep warm. Put the cherries in a saucepan with the orange juice, sugar, and 2 sprigs of hyssop. Cook gently until the juice is released from the fruit, then remove from the heat and discard the hyssop. Blend the arrowroot with the eau-de-vie, brandy, or water and add to the cherries together with the wine stock and the allspice. Cook, stirring, over a moderate heat for 3-5 minutes until the sauce has cleared and thickened. Add the leaves from the remaining sprigs of hyssop and check the flavor of the sauce, adding salt and/or sugar to taste. Remove from the heat and add the butter. When it has melted, spoon some sauce over the

duck and serve the rest from a sauce boat. (Geraldene Holt's Complete Book of Herbs)

### **Peach Tart with Hyssop**

Pastry

1 cup all-purpose flour  
2 Tbsp plus ½ tsp superfine sugar  
5 tbsb finely ground, unblanched hazelnuts  
5 Tbsp butter, half-frozen  
1 egg, separated  
1 Tbsp milk  
a few drops of vanilla extract

Filling

6 medium-sized fresh peaches  
½ cup sugar  
2/3 cup water  
4 sprigs of hyssop  
1 tsp arrowroot

Garnish

A few leaves of hyssop and some hyssop flowers

Sift the flour and 2 Tbsp of the sugar into a bowl, then stir in the hazelnuts. Grate in the butter and mix to a dough with the egg yolk, milk and vanilla extract. Roll the dough into a ball and rest under the upturned bowl for 15 minutes. On a floured board, roll out the pastry to line a greased 8 inch tart pan. Prick the base of the pastry lightly and bake the pastry case blind in a 350F oven for 15 minutes until it is just changing color at the edges. Lightly beat the egg white with the ½ tsp of sugar and brush over the inside of the pastry case. Return to the oven for 5 minutes until the pastry is golden brown and the egg white has cooked to a glaze. Cool the pastry case in the pan. Cover the peaches with boiling water for a few minutes then lift out and remove the skins. Slice the fruit onto a plate. Dissolve the sugar in the water over moderate heat then simmer with three sprigs of the hyssop for 4 minutes. Remove the sprigs of hyssop and add the peaches. Poach gently for 4-5 minutes until the fruit is tender but not overcooked. Lift it out with a slotted spoon and add the arrowroot, mixed with a little water, to the pan. Cook, stirring, until clear and thickened. Remove

from the heat, stir in the chopped leaves of the remaining prig of hyssop and cool slightly . Arrange the peach slices in overlapping circles in the tart case and spoon the syrup over the fruit. Decorate with the extra leaves and flowers. Serve at room temperature within 2 hours while the pastry is still crisp. (Recipes from a French Herb Garden)

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#### **Resources:**

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Crimson Sage, <http://www.crimson-sage.com> Plants

Wood Violet Herb Farm, [www.woodvioletherbfarm.com](http://www.woodvioletherbfarm.com) Plants

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