

## MINT, GINGER



### *Mentha x gracilis*

[MEN-thuh GRASS-il-is]

**Family:** Labiatae

**Names:** austrian Mint, Mint, Red Mint, Scotch Spearmint, red stemmed mint, Vietnamese mint

**Description:** A hybrid between *Mentha arvensis* x *Mentha spicata*. Erect growth. Round, green leaves on red stems are 2 to 4 inches across. Lavender blooms appear on long, slender spikes. Pleasing apple/ginger fragrance. Height of 15-24 inches. This mint is unique in that it contains both menthol and carvone, becoming a true "double mint". The whole plant has a strong minty aroma with a hint of ginger.

**Cultivation:** 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 production of essential oils, but it also succeeds in partial shade. This species is somewhat less easy in cultivation than most other mints. It can be lost over winter if the weather is very cold or wet so ensure that it is grown in a warm, well-drained sunny position. A sterile hybrid, the result of a cross between *M. arvensis* and *M. spicata*, though it can back-cross with its parents. There are some named varieties, most of which have variegated leaves. 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. Members of this genus are rarely if ever troubled by browsing deer. 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. On the world mint market this mint is second only to peppermint, however this is a substantial market and it is increasing.

**Properties:** Antiseptic; Carminative; Febrifuge.

**Medicinal Uses:** Ginger 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 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.

**Culinary Uses:** The leaves are used as a flavoring in salads or cooked foods. A refreshing odor and taste, they are said to go particularly well with melon, tomatoes and fruit salads. The slight ginger scent make them an interesting addition to fresh salads. A herb tea is made from the leaves. An essential oil from the leaves is used as a spearmint flavoring and in chewing gums.

When making lemonade, before adding the water muddle ginger mint and the zest of a lemon, and sugar to taste. A snippet of ginger mint is nice in a cup of hot chocolate. For an hors d'oeuvre, add chopped ginger mint to a mashed-sweet-pea "guacamole," a version of the avocado dip made with fresh green peas, or combine it with chopped parsley and sprinkle over a first-course hot or cold fresh green pea soup. A sliced fennel salad dressed with a light vinaigrette and tomato sandwich with a lemony mayonnaise infused with ginger mint. Chicken is excellent marinated in a mixture of ginger mint, onions and yogurt. An exotic and floral dessert is balls of honeydew melon macerated in rosewater and ginger mint. Ginger mint's essence marries well with other fruits macerated in complementary liqueurs such as Grand Marnier with oranges, framboise with raspberries, or strawberry liqueur with strawberries.

**Other Uses:** 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.

## Recipes

### Rhubarb and Ginger Mint Preserve

4 lb rhubarb  
1 cup water  
juice of 1 lemon  
2 in piece fresh root ginger, peeled  
6 cups sugar  
2/3 cup preserved stem ginger, chopped  
2-3 Tbsp very finely chopped ginger mint leaves

Wash and trim the rhubarb, cutting it into small pieces about 1 inch long. Place the rhubarb, water and lemon juice in a preserving pan and bring to the boil. Peel and bruise the piece of fresh root ginger and add it to the pan. Simmer, stirring frequently, until the rhubarb is soft and then remove the ginger. Add the sugar and stir until it has dissolved. Bring the mixture to the boil and boil rapidly for 10-15 minutes, or until setting point is reached. With a metal slotted spoon, remove any scum from the surface of the jam. Add the stem ginger and ginger mint leaves. Pour into sterilized glass jars, seal with waxed paper circles and cover with cellophane lids secured with rubber bands. (Herbal Pleasures: Cooking and Crafts)

### Tzaziki with Ginger Mint

½ cucumber, skinned and roughly diced  
5 oz plain yoghurt  
1 clove of garlic, crushed  
1 Tbsp ginger mint leaves, chopped  
1 Tbsp ginger mint flowers removed from the flower head and with no green attached  
freshly ground salt and pepper  
4 whole ginger mint leaves  
4 whole ginger mint flowers

Place the cucumber in a colander, sprinkle with salt and leave to stand for 30 minutes to draw out the juices. Rinse under a cold tap, drain well and dry on absorbent kitchen towel. Put the cucumber in a serving bowl, pour over the yoghurt, add the garlic, mint leaves and flowers and mix well. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Cover and chill in the refrigerator. When ready to serve, decorate with the 4 leaves and flowers. (Good Enough to Eat)

### **Ginger Mint Ice-Cream**

1 oz ginger mint  
½ pint creamy milk  
¼ pint double cream  
3 egg yolks  
4 oz caster sugar  
1 heaped Tbsp stem ginger, finely chopped

Place the mint, with the milk and cream, in a large saucepan and bring slowly to the boil. As soon as you see the bubbles, remove from the heat and stir well, pressing down on the int. Cover with a lid and leave to infuse for 30 minutes. Then strain through a sieve. Mix the egg yolks and sugar in a bowl with a whisk, until they are pale and fluffy. Then pour the milk mixture, with the stem of ginger, into the bowl, whisking all the time. Return this to a heavy-based saucepan and cook, over a low heat, until the custard thickens, stirring constantly (could take 5 minutes). Pour the custard into a shallow bowl, cover closely with saran wrap and cool. Once it is cold, pour it into an ice-cream maker and churn, or into a shallow freezer box and place in the freezer, removing every hour, to beat well. (3 times). (Feasting on Herbs)

### **Hot Ginger Mint Tea with Candied Ginger**

2 Tbsp fresh ginger mint leaves  
2 cups boiling water  
2 pieces candied ginger

Rinse the ginger mint leaves with cold water, then gently bruise them with a wooden spoon or pestle. Rinse a 2-cup teapot with boiling water. Place in it the mint leaves, then pour in the boiling water. Cover the teapot so the steam doesn't escape. Steep for 3-5 minutes. Strain the tea into 2 warmed cups rinsed with boiling water. Place 1 piece of candied ginger in each teacup. (Exotic Herbs)

### **References:**

Exotic Herbs, Carole Saville, Henry Holt and Company, 1997; ISBN: 0-8050-4073-0  
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