

BERGAMOT



Monarda didyma
[mo-NAR-duh DID-ee-muh]

Family: Labiatae

Names: Oswego tea plant, bee balm, Fragrant balm, indian's plume, red balm; monarde écarlate, thé d'Oswégo (French); Goldmelisse, Monarde-Tee (German); scharlaken-rode monarde, Pennsylvanische thee (Dutch); menta rosa (Italian); monarda (Spanish)

Description: Perennial, bee balm grows two to three feet tall with a large ragged head of bright crimson flowers and reddish bracts from

late June to September. Like other members of the mint family, it has square stems and opposite leaves.

Cultivation: Start the seed in a cold frame in mid-summer. By the following spring it will be strong enough to be transplanted. An alternative is to direct seed bee balm into the garden in November. The seeds will germinate in the spring. By the second year it will reach its mature size. It can be propagated from root divisions. It usually needs dividing about every three years. Dig up the fibrous roots in early spring. Divide and replant the outer roots, which are the newer roots and discard the center. Allow at least eighteen inches between plants. To get the largest blooms, the plant should not be allowed to flower the first year. Cut back any flower heads as they form. The second and subsequent years, cut the flower head back after it blooms, and you may get a second flowering in the fall. After a killing frost, cut back the stalks almost to the ground and mulch the plant well. In spring, remember to remove the mulch.

History: Bergamot is a native of the swampy areas of the US and Canada, growing as far south as Georgia. It was first described in 1569 in a book on American flora by a famous Spanish botanist-priest, Nicholas Monardez. The botanical name *Monarda didyma* was given in his honor. The common names refer to the attributes of this herb. "Bergamot" refers to its aroma which is reminiscent of the bergamot orange. The name Oswego Tea refers to its use as a beverage by Indians from the Oswego River area in New York. The name bee balm came as evidence of bees' love for the flowers' nectar.

Medicinal Uses: Bergamot tea is soothing and relaxing and makes a good night-time drink. Add a handful of fresh leaves to your bath to soothe tired and aching limbs (in a net bag). Native Americans used the leaves of monarda as a poultice and compress on skin eruptions, as a tea for colds and flus and inhaled as a steam to relieve sinus and lung congestion. Scientific evidence shows that bergamot may inhibit the herpes simplex and the related chicken pox viruses. It is also combined with other herbs to treat urinary tract infections and indigestion.

Veterinary Use: Bee balm has excellent antibacterial qualities and is especially useful for mouth and gum infections either a poultice of the infusion or a tincture. Bee balm skin rinses can bring relief to itchy skin from infected fleabites or spontaneous dermatitis. In large animals, the tea can be used as a douche or enema to treat fungal or bacterial infections or to treat irritations of the rectum or vagina. Works well for low-grade urinary tract infections.

Culinary Uses: The flowers taste like honeysuckle. Some describe it as citrusy, sweet, hot and minty. They are excellent in fruit salads. Soak the flowers in cold water prior to using because they often harbor tiny insects. Try blending the leaves with mints and a touch of orange peel to bring out the citruslike flavor in tea. Native Americans used it as a food flavoring. The florets can also be added to an edible salad or become cake decorations.

Recipes:

Spicy Prunes with Bergamot

1 lb prunes
cold black tea
¾ pint cider vinegar
8 oz demerara sugar
1 cinnamon stick
allspice berries
piece of ginger
6 cloves
5 bergamot leaves

Soak the prunes overnight in the cold tea. Place all the spices in a muslin bag and put in a pan with the vinegar and sugar, heat until boiling and then cool. Cook the prunes in a little tea until they are soft, then drain and reserve the juice. Measure off ½ pint of the prune and tea liquor and mix with the spiced vinegar. Pour this liquid over the prunes, put into jars and cover. They will be ready within a week. (Herbal Gifts)

Bergamot Sausages with Apple

75- g good quality pork sausages
1 large cooking apple, sliced thickly, not peeled
15 g butter or 1 Tbsp olive oil
¾ cup stock, cider or water
1 medium onion, sliced
1 clove garlic
1 dessertspoon finely chopped bergamot leaves
2 Tbsp plain flour
¼ tsp cinnamon
salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Core apple but don't peel. Melt butter or heat oil and gently sauté apple until soft. Roll sausages in flour, prick and fry until golden brown. In a casserole dish place alternate layers of apple slices and sausages, together with bergamot, salt, pepper and cinnamon (lightly dusted). Pour over chosen liquid, cover tightly and simmer for an hour or until sausages are done. (Herbs for Home and Garden)

Bergamot Flowery Fruit Salad

3 yellow or green unpeeled apples, diced
1 medium bunch black grapes, seeded
2 bananas sliced and peeled
½ cubed cantaloupe
juice 2 lemons
½ cup sherry
¼ cup brandy
4 bergamot flowers, torn into pieces

Pour lemon juice over diced apples and sliced bananas to prevent browning. Place in glass dish. Remove seeds from grapes by cutting almost in halves and flicking seeds out with the point of a small knife. Add to glass dish together with melon. Mix wine with brandy and pour over fruit and mix gently but

well. Chill, and just before serving toss bergamot flowers on top. This salad may be prepared the day before serving, but add flowers only at the last minute. (Herbs for the Home and Garden)

Tomato and bergamot loaf

1½ cups canned tomatoes with juice
2 Tbsp water
2 Tbsp chopped bergamot leaves
1 cup celery, chopped
1½ cups packaged breadcrumbs
1 cup grated tasty cheese
2 Tbsp vegetable oil
2 Tbsp onion, grated ½ tsp salt
2 eggs, beaten

Break up tomatoes and mix together with all the ingredients in the order given, spoon into an oiled ovenproof dish and bake in a moderate oven 350F for 20 minutes. Serve hot. (Herbs Their Cultivation and Usage)

Raspberry-Mint Divinity

3 cups sugar
¾ cup light corn syrup
1 pkg raspberry jello
¾ cup water
¼ cup fresh bergamot mint leaves
2 egg whites
1 cup chopped walnuts
½ cup coconut (optional)

Combine sugar, corn syrup, water and mint leaves and heat slowly, stirring until the sugar is dissolved. Strain and discard the herbs. Boil the mixture over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until it reaches 252F or the hard ball stage. Beat egg whites until fluffy, gradually add the dry jello, then beat until the whites form stiff peaks. Gradually pour the hot syrup over the egg whites, beating constantly, until the mixture holds its shape. Add chopped nuts and, if desired the coconut. Pour into a greased 9x9-inch pan, cool, and cut into squares when firm.

Potatoes and Bacon with Bergamot

4 oz diced bacon
2 oz butter
10 small onions or shallots

1 Tbsp flour
½ pint stick
1 ½ lb cubed potatoes
2 tsp bergamot

Fry the bacon in the butter, add the onions and cook until transparent. Remove the bacon and onions. Stir the flour into the fat in the pan until brown. Add stock and bring to boil. Put the potatoes into this sauce with the bacon and onions. Bring to boil, cover and cook at 350F for 1 hour. Serve sprinkled with chopped bergamot. (The Illustrated Book of Herbs)

Bergamot Jelly

3 handfuls of chopped bergamot leaves
4 lb cooking apples
12 oz white sugar in 1 pint juices

Peel and slice the apples and put in a large pan with enough water to cover and the bergamot leaves. Simmer until soft, then pour into a clean jelly bag. Leave to drip through overnight. Measure the juice and add the sugar. Stir over a low heat to dissolve the sugar, then bring to a rolling boil. Boil for 8 minutes before testing setting point. Put a little of the jelly on a cold plate and if a skin forms quickly the jelly is ready. Pour into warm, clean jars, seal and cover. (The Illustrated Book of Herbs)

Hummingbird Bread

1 package dry yeast
¼ cup warm water
2 Tbsp margarine or vegetable oil
½ tsp honey
4 cups flour
1 cup bee balm flowers (red petals only)
1 cup water at room temperature
1 egg white, lightly beaten

Dissolve yeast in warm water in mixing bowl. Add margarine or vegetable oil and honey; mix thoroughly. Add flour and flower petals alternately with water; beat after each addition. Knead the last of the flour/flowers mixture into the dough by hand. Shape into ball and place in greased bowl, turning once to oil all surfaces. Cover with damp towel; allow to rise in a warm place until doubled in size

(45-60 minutes). Punch dough down; turn onto lightly floured board and knead for 5 minutes. Divide dough in half and shape into two round loaves. Place loaves 4 inches apart on a greased cookie sheet and cover with damp towel. Allow to rise for 30 minutes. Brush top with beaten egg white and spread more bee balm blossoms that have been dipped in the egg white over top of bread. Bake in a preheated 400F oven for 45-50 minutes or until loaves are lightly browned. While a bit too crumbly for sandwiches, this bread is wonderful toasted, brushed with a whisper of olive and dusted with grated Parmesan cheese. (Sage Cottage Herb Garden Cookbook)

Peach Shortcakes with Bergamot Flowers

6 to 8 very ripe peaches, peeled and sliced
1 Tbsp lemon juice
1-2 Tbsp sugar
2-3 Tbsp bergamot flowers
2 cups unbleached white flour
1 Tbsp baking powder
scant ½ tsp salt
3 Tbsp sugar
6 Tbsp unsalted butter
1 cup half and half with 1 Tbsp bergamot flowers
1 Tbsp unsalted butter, melted
whipping cream or vanilla ice cream

Preheat oven to 425F and lightly butter a baking sheet. Toss the peaches in a bowl with the lemon juice, sugar and half of the bergamot flowers. If the fruit is tart, use the larger amount of sugar; if it is sweet, use less. Reserve the remaining flowers for garnishing the desert. Combine the flour, baking powder, salt, and 2 Tbsp of the sugar in a bowl or food processor. Cut the butter into the mixture until it is a coarse meal. Add the half-and-half with the bergamot flowers to the dry ingredients and mix until just blended; do not overmix. Turn the dough onto a floured surface and knead 8 or 10 times. Roll or pat the dough to about ¾ inch thick. Using a 3-inch cutter, cut out rounds using all of the dough. Place the rounds of dough on the baking sheet, brush the tops with the melted butter, and sprinkle them with the reserved tablespoon of sugar.

Monarda Snapper

2 Tbsp butter
1 clove garlic, minced
1 Tbsp lemon thyme flowers, coarsely chopped
½ cup bee balm flowers, coarsely chopped
olive oil
4 red snapper fillets
¼ cup Riesling wine or other light white wine.

Melt butter in a skillet. Add garlic and sauté for 2 minutes. Add flowers and sauté for 1 minute. Remove from heat. Heat a large skillet. Pour in just enough olive oil to lightly coat pan. Add red snapper. Cook over a medium heat for 3 minutes on one side. Turn fillets over and pour on sauce. Continue to cook until fish just turns opaque. Remove to a serving platter. Return skillet to heat. Add wine to deglaze pan, stirring continually. Pour liquid over fish fillets. Serve immediately. (Edible Flowers from Garden to Palate)

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