

## WORMWOOD



### *Artemisia absinthium*

[ar-te-MIZ-ee-uh ab-SIN-thee-um]

**Family:** Compositae

**Names:** Old Woman, la Fee Verte, armoise; The Green Muse, Absinth, absinthium, green ginger, madderwort, Crown for a King; Wermut, Vermut, Wurmkraut, Wermuth, Wermutkraut, Bitterer Beifuss (German); absinthe, grande absinthe, herbe d'absinthe, herbe aux vers, herbe-sainte, alvire (French); assenzio, assenzio romano (Italian); Absintalsem, absintkruid (Dutch); Koirohi (Estonian); Afseniin (Farsi); Koiruoho (Finnish); Buramaide (Gaelic); Ekte malurt (norwegian); piolun, Bylica piolun (Polish); Malört (Swedish); Ajenjo, mayor, artemisia, yerba maestra, altamisa, estafiate (Spanish); vermout, losna, sintro, absint, alosna (Portuguese); shagaret mariam, shadjret mariam, fsantin-e-hindi, kashus-rumi (Arabic);

**Description:** bushy, coarse herbal shrub. Height: 4 feet with a width of 2 feet. Flowers are small, 1/8 inch across, tinted yellow. The leaves are slightly hairy, gray, divided to give an almost lacy effect. It blooms August to September.

**Cultivation:** A perennial to zone 4. Germination is from 10-24 days and needs light to germinate so plant a shallow depth. Space at 3 feet. Soil temperature 60-70F in a dry, fairly poor soil with some clay and a pH of 5.5-7.5 in full sun (can tolerate partial shade). Can be propagated by cuttings or root divisions. The leaves and probably the roots exude a substance that restricts growth of neighboring plants...especially thymes, mints and other culinary herbs so give it at least a three-foot buffer between it and adjacent plants. The flowering herb is collected minus its woody stems and dried in thin layers. The drug has a spicy smell and a bitter aromatic taste.

**History:** The generic name refers to Artemis, goddess of maternity, because wormwood was used in regulating women's menstrual disorders. And the ancient Greeks claimed that it counteracted the poisons of hemlock, mushrooms and even sea dragons. The Romans called it *absinthium* after *absinthial*, their word for "bitter". Though used to eliminate intestinal parasites, the name really comes from the Anglo-Saxon *wermode*, which means "waremood," or "mind preserver."

It gained wide popularity in the latter half of the nineteenth century as a drink, especially in France, where it was the favorite of many artists and intellectuals. This surge in interest was a result of French soldiers fighting in Algeria in the 1840s drinking absinthe as a preventative against malaria and other diseases. Sales were subsequently prohibited when it was found that the drink provoked serious nervous and psychological disorders. The first recipes were developed in Switzerland in the late 1700s, but later Pernod used wormwood for his drink when he opened a factory in France. His liquor consisted of alcohol and aromatic herbs

that determined its distinctive green color, as well as its characteristic taste and smell. The main ingredients were aniseed, fennel, hyssop, and lemon balm; minor ingredients were angelica, star anise, dittany, juniper, nutmeg, and veronica. These were all macerated together with wormwood plants dried in alcohol. After being left to stand, water was added and distillation proceeded. Other dried and powdered herbs were added to the distillate, including Roman wormwood. The liquid was then diluted to give a concentration of 74% alcohol by volume. The liquor appeared green because of the solution of chlorophyll, extracted from the plant. The custom was to drink it with water which was poured over a lump of sugar in a strainer. The drink turned cloudy and slightly yellow, due to the suspension of essential oils, predominantly thujone, separated by the dilution. To improve the look of the drink, some producers would add trichloride of antimony, a poisonous salt; but already the effects of the thujone were poisonous, provoking symptoms similar to epilepsy, without further additions. In 1913, the French drank 40 million liters of absinthe, and its sale was prohibited after 1915. As a substitute for this popular drink, Pernod was soon sold everywhere, which excluded wormwood from its formula and increased the amount of aniseed.

It still provides the bitter taste for vermouth, for the Italian wine Cinzano and in martinis. It was also added to hops to make beer more heady and is a traditional stuffing for goose.

**Constituents:** essential oil includes thujone, to 35%, bitters (absinthum), sesquiterpene lactones (absinthin, artabsin, anabsinthin, etc), flavonoids, phenolic acids, lignans, azulenes.

**Character:** bitter, pungent, drying, quite cold

**Properties:** aromatic bitter; stimulates secretion of bile (choleric); anti-inflammatory; eliminates worms (vermifuge); eases stomach pain; mild antidepressant;

anthelmintic, deodorant; narcotic; stimulant (digestive); tonic; febrifuge; emmenagogue.

**Medicinal Use:** Wormwood leaves' primary use is to stimulate the gallbladder, help prevent, and release stones, and to adjust resulting digestive problems. Clinical studies with volunteers proved that wormwood does effectively increase bile. It expels roundworms and threadworms, probably due to its sesquiterpene lactones. It is also a muscle relaxer that is occasionally added to liniments, especially for rheumatism. Members of the Bedouin African tribe place the antiseptic leaves inside their nostrils as a decongestant and drink it for coughs.

Wormwood is an extremely useful medicine for those with weak and underactive digestions. It increases stomach acid and bile production and therefore improves digestion and the absorption of nutrients, making it helpful for many conditions including anemia. It also eases gas and bloating, and if the tincture is taken regularly, it slowly strengthens the digestion and helps the body return to full vitality after a prolonged illness.

#### APPLICATIONS:

Infusion—take a weak infusion (5-10 g herb to 500 ml water) for sluggish digestion, poor appetite, and gastritis. Prescribed for jaundice and hepatitis and to expel intestinal worms.

Tincture—Use as the infusion, but do not exceed 3 ml daily

Compress—Soak a pad in the infusion to soothe bruises and bites

Wash—Use the infusion externally for infestations such as scabies.

#### *Fisherman's Friend Liniment*

1 cup wormwood leaves and flowers

1 cup nettle leaves

1 cup devil's club root bark

½ cup mustard leaves, flowers, and pods

4 cups 160-proof vodka

Place herbs and vodka in jar and shake well. Keep in cool dark place; shake 1 or 2 times daily for 2 weeks. Strain. Use as a rub on sore muscles.

**HOMEOPATHIC:** Is used for epilepsy, insomnia, tremors, and vertigo, especially when accompanied by nausea and bloating.

**Aromatherapy:**

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

Characteristic: a dark green or bluish oil with a spicy, warm, bitter-green odor and a sharp, fresh top note. The “de-thujonized” oil blends well with oakmoss, jasmine, orange blossom, lavender and hyacinth

Uses: Occasionally used in rubefacient pharmaceutical preparations and as a fragrance component in toiletries, cosmetics and perfumes. Widely employed (at minute levels) as a flavoring agent in alcoholic bitters and vermouths; also to a lesser extent in soft drinks and some foods, especially confectionery and desserts.

**Ritual Use:** Gender—Hot; Planet—Mars & Venus; Element—Air; Associated Deities: Diana & Iris; Basic powers: Clairvoyance, protection. Once burned in all incenses designed to raise spirits, now used in clairvoyance and divinatory incenses as well as in exorcism and protection blends. Burn while using a pendulum. The leaves are burned around Bedouin African newborns to ensure their health.

An old love charm: on St. Luke’s day, take marigold flowers, a sprig of marjoram, thyme and a little wormwood; dry them before a fire, rub them to powder, then sift it through a fine piece of lawn and simmer it over a slow fire, adding a small quantity of virgin honey, and vinegar. Anoint yourself with this when you go to bed, saying the following lines three times, and you will dream of your partner “that is to be”: “St. Luke, St. Luke, be kind to me, In dreams let me my true-love see.”

**Toxicity:** Large amounts of wormwood can be toxic to people. The thujone it contains is addictive and can damage the central nervous

system. The US FDA classifies it as dangerous. It is thought to interact with the same brain receptors as does marijuana. Products that are flavored with wormwood must contain thujone-free extracts. Absinthe can cause insomnia, nightmares, convulsions and vomiting. Don’t use wormwood at all if pregnant.

**Cosmetic Uses:** An infusion of the leaves and flower tops, sweetened with honey, makes a tonic drink and can clear the blood of impurities and the skin of blemishes. An infusion, mixed with rosemary, will prevent falling hair if regularly rubbed into the scalp.

*Astringent Lotion:* Place a handful of rosemary tops and one of wormwood in a large screw-top glass jar and over them add 2 pints of malt vinegar. Leave in a sunny window for a week, then add 1 oz powdered camphor, leave for 24 hours, strain and bottle. Use undiluted on the face, neck and forehead to tighten the skin. This is an effective cooler on a hot day and will close the pores.

**Recipes:**

**Absinthe:**

- 30.0 g wormwood
- 8.5 g hyssop
- 1.8 g calamus
- 6.0 g melissa
- 30.0 g anise seed
- 25.0 g fennel seed
- 10.0 g star anise
- 3.2 g coriander seed

Put the dry herbs in a large jar. Dampen slightly. Add 800 milliliters of 85-95% alcohol. Wine spirits make a better product than pure grain alcohol. Let it steep for a week shaking occasionally. Then add 600 milliliters of water and let the whole macerate for another day. Decant off the liquid squeezing as much from the mass of herb as possible. Wet the herbs with some vodka and squeeze again. Recipe should give a little over a liter and a half of green liquor. It must then be distilled.

In the distillation, change the receiver when the distillate turns yellow: those are the

faints. Color the distillate by again adding: 4.2 g mint, 1.1 g melissa, 3.0 g wormwood, 1.0 g citron peel, 4.2 g liquorice root. Let the herbs macerate for another three or four days. Decant, filter, bottle. You will probably want to carefully add some concentrated sugar syrup to the blend. The result is a Swiss style absinthe of about 135 proof. Recipe makes one liter. (Pharmakopoeia)

### **Absinthe – New version**

One ounce dried chopped wormwood  
One tablespoon fennel or anise seeds  
One tablespoon white sage  
One teaspoon spearmint  
One half teaspoon coriander seeds  
One quarter teaspoon caraway seeds  
One pinch cardamom pods  
750 ml. 151 rum

The angelica and hyssop were replaced with white sage and spearmint which means a stronger, mellower absinthe. In a glass container add the wormwood to the 151. Set aside in the dark for ten days. This will give you an authentic green-colored tincture (the green comes from the chlorophyll, and does not indicate the presence of the active ingredient, thujone). 151 rum works best. Then strain out the wormwood and add all the remaining herbs and spices. Wait four more days, then strain these out and serve. Best drunken mixed with cold water half and half, or dribble a little in a tall glass with ice and sour mix or cranberry juice.

### **Asinthe**

One ounce dried chopped wormwood  
One tablespoon angelica root  
One teaspoon hyssop  
One half teaspoon coriander seeds  
One quarter teaspoon caraway seeds  
One pinch cardamom pods  
One pinch fennel or anise seeds  
One liter 100 proof vodka  
In a glass container add the wormwood to the vodka. Set aside in the dark for ten days. Then strain out the wormwood and add all the remaining herbs and spices. Wait four more

days, then strain these out and serve. Best when drank straight in short shots with water chasers.

### **Absinthe Suisse**

2 oz absinthe  
One splash anisette  
1/2 oz white creme de menthe  
One raw egg white  
Pour everything into a cocktail mixer with ice and shaking vigorously, then strain into a chilled cocktail glass. If you can't find white creme de menthe, use clear creme de menthe and add a splash of heavy cream (it's supposed to be cream colored). If it is still too strong, add a splash of club soda. Variation: pour over white ice cubes in a glass goblet. Dust with nutmeg, and garnish with a sprig of fresh wormwood, two green straws, and a Swiss flag. Make the white ice cubes by pouring a little milk into the ice cube tray with water and freezing well ahead of time.

### **Absinthe Margarita**

2 oz absinthe  
Sour mix  
1/2 oz Grande Marnier or triple sec  
Lime juice  
wedge lime  
Splash tequila  
Just substitute absinthe for tequila. Salt the rim, fill glass with ice. Pour in the absinthe and sour mix. Splash in some tequila just to kill the odor and taste of the absinthe. Float the triple sec. Garnish with lime. Salud!

### **Cajun Mary**

2 oz absinthe  
Bloody Mary mix (spicy tomato juice)  
Splash tabasco sauce  
Splash worchestershire sauce  
Sand and pepper  
1 jumbo shrimp  
Fill cocktail glass with ice. Pour in absinthe and bloody mary mix. Add the worchestershire and tabasco. Salt and pepper it. Garnish with the shrimp.  
For a great impression, use brown ice cubes made with worchestershire dribbled into the water in an ice tray and frozen ahead of time.

### **Bloody Brain**

1 oz absinthe  
1/2 oz amaretto  
Bailey's or other Irish cream liqueur  
grenadine

Substituting absinthe for 151 rum: In a shot glass, start with the amaretto. Then using the back of a spoon, dribble the absinthe down the inside of the glass, layering it on top of the amaretto.

Using the spoon again, slowly pour in the Bailey's, letting it curl into a cloud on top of the amaretto. Sprinkle a couple drops of grenadine (blood) on top. It should look vaguely like a brain floating in formaldehyde. (Also known as a Brain Hemorrhage). Best tossed back in one gulp. shots.

### **Other Absinthe Variations On Popular Drinks:**

Black Orchid: substitute absinthe for the vodka (Make some blue ice cubes by dribbling blue curacao into an ice tray with water. Way cool looking, and delicious, too.)

Black Devil: substitute absinthe for the rum. Vermouth is white wine flavored with wormwood.

Dirty Martini: substitute absinthe for the gin. Basically, same as above with a splash of brine from the olive jar.

Screaming Banshee: substitute absinthe for the vodka (basically a shot of absinthe added to a Banshee).

Frappe (Hawaiian ice): absinthe over shaved ice with the flavoring of your choice (lime juice, pineapple juice, grenadine, etc.)

### **Another Absinthe Recipe**

Procure a gallon jug and insert:  
Wormwood (enough to cover 3/4 to 1/2 inch at the bottom of the jug while fluffy)  
Licorice Root (10-15 sticks, but more than the wormwood)  
Cardamom Seeds (10-15 pods worth)  
750 ml of 152 proof neutral grain spirits  
1 liter of cheap 80 proof vodka  
Leave this in a warm dark place for three days, periodically shaking, then add to the

mixture somewhere between .5 and 2.0 tablespoons each of:

Angelica root  
Coriander seed  
Anise seed  
Fennel seed  
Whole Cloves  
Black and White Peppercorns  
Lavender (4 tbsp.)  
1/2 Whole Vanilla Bean  
a little more wormwood  
some lemon peel  
a pinch of Blue Green Algae (for color and vitamins)  
1 small ginseng root  
and let the mixture sit for the remainder of the week in a warm dark place. Once again periodically removing it to agitate. At the end of the week remove it and filter and re-filter the liquid from the solid materials. Save the vanilla bean if you can because it looks nice at the bottom of the bottle. Once you have decanted and filtered your way down to as clear a liquid as you can imagine getting, find three bottles each holding about 750 ml, empty and wash them and as the final stage begins, add about a half a cup of honey to two of the bottles while they are still empty, and a quarter cup to the third. Using your bar funnel, pour the liquid into the bottles according to their amounts of honey and seal them up. Then shake each bottle vigorously to mix the honey with the liquor. By the time you finish, the proof should be between 100 and 110 and you should have a quite serviceable Absinthe liqueur.

### **Scientific American Recipe by Dr. Arnold**

Distilled  
2.5 kilograms of dried wormwood  
5 kilograms of anise  
5 kilograms of fennel  
95 liters of 85 percent ethanol  
45 liters of water  
1 kilogram of Roman wormwood  
1 kilogram of hyssop  
500 grams of lemon balm  
An 1855 recipe from Pontarlier, France, gives the following instructions for making absinthe: Macerate 2.5 kilograms of dried wormwood, 5

kilograms of anise and 5 kilograms of fennel in 95 liters of 85 percent ethanol by volume. Let the mixture steep for at least 12 hours in the pot of a double boiler. Add 45 liters of water and apply heat; collect 95 liters of distillate. To 40 liters of the distillate, add 1 kilogram of Roman wormwood, 1 kilogram of hyssop and 500 grams of lemon balm, all of which have been dried and finely divided. Extract at a moderate temperature, then siphon off the liquor, filter, and reunite it with the remaining 55 liters of distillate. Dilute with water to produce approximately 100 liters of absinthe with a final alcohol concentration of 74 percent by volume (4).

### **Absinthe Wine**

2 tsp dried peppermint leaves  
2 tsp dried thyme  
2 tsp dried hyssop  
2 tsp dried sage  
2 tsp dried wormwood  
2 tsp dried lavender  
2 tsp dried marjoram  
2 pints port wine

Steep the herbs in the wine for 1 week before filtering through muslin and bottling. (Mastering Herbalism)

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### **Resources:**

Companion Plants, [www.companionplants.com](http://www.companionplants.com) plants

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