

BARTY PHILLIPS



AN
ILLUSTRATED
A-Z OF THE
WORLD'S
MOST POPULAR
CULINARY AND
MEDICINAL PLANTS

THE BOOK OF
H·E·R·B·S



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Clockwise from top left: black pepper, chives, mint,
rosemary, oregano, feverfew.

INTRODUCTION

Herbs are nature's most useful plants. For centuries, they have been prized for their health-giving properties, and for their ability to add delicious flavors to food. Herbs were among the earliest plants to be cultivated, and their culinary, medical and cosmetic benefits have been studied since ancient times.

Now, *The Book of Herbs* brings together this wealth of information in one handy volume. It covers everything from everyday favorites, such as sage (used as a powerful soothing agent, as well as the perfect flavoring for rich meats), to more unusual plants like the tasty and nutritious Good King Henry, once one of Europe's most widely used culinary herbs.

Each page has a picture of the plant itself, with extra pictures explaining which parts are used and how to

prepare them. Then there's a ready-reference panel that gives you a quick guide to the plant's properties. This is divided into sections covering the herb's culinary uses, medical benefits (including any special precautions), household and cosmetic applications. Finally, there's a panel that describes the plant in detail, including its history and cultivation—with advice on herbs you might want to grow yourself.

The pages are in alphabetical order, making it easy to find the herb you're interested in, or just browse to discover a wealth of fascinating new plant lore. And because some herbs are known by different common names, you'll find an index of all their botanical names at the back of the book.



Leaf

Thick, fleshy, tapering to a point. Pale green, often flecked with white, with small spines along edges.

Leaf Base

Has no stem but a base from which leaves, and eventually a flowering spike, grow.

Root

Strong, due to ability to grow in scrubby land. Light brown and fibrous.

Split Leaf

Contains soothing gelatinous sap, used to heal burns and moisturize dry skin.

ALOE VERA

This sun-loving plant will grow in dry conditions. It is cultivated commercially for the sap that can be extracted from its leaves. The sap is used for its healing and moisturizing properties.

The sap taken from the fleshy leaves of aloe vera has given this plant a reputation for almost miraculous soothing, healing, and moisturizing properties. Today, it appears as an ingredient in many creams, suntan lotions, and hair-care products.

The clear, gelatinous sap has a remarkable effect on burnt or irritated skin. It forms a soothing and protective barrier that allows the skin beneath to heal undisturbed. If aloe vera gel is applied to a burn immediately, it can prevent the formation of scar tissue. Aloe vera is so effective that it even has a reputation for healing radiation burns.

Strong Medicine

Aloes have been used medicinally for over two thousand years. An extract called “bitter aloes” is used as a laxative, and in some countries its use is subject to legal restrictions.

Aloe vera juice, which is now widely available in health food shops, is quite different from bitter aloes. It may help in cases of stubborn constipation since it has a soothing, possibly laxative effect on the bowel.

Origins

Aloe vera originates in tropical Africa, and Muslims regard the aloe as a religious symbol. In the past, those who had made the sacred pilgrimage to Mecca were entitled to hang the aloe over their

doorway. Four hundred years ago, aloe vera was taken to the West Indies, where it is now widely cultivated on a commercial scale.

USES

PARTS USED:

Leaves.

PROPERTIES:

Soothing, healing, and moisturizing.

USES OF THE HERB:

Medicinal

Slice fresh leaves and apply to skin to ease dermatitis, eczema, or extreme dryness. Apply a little gel from a cut leaf to a small burn or open a leaf and bandage in place—gel side down—over a large burn, before seeking medical attention. Aloe vera gel can be applied directly to insect bites and fungal infections. Cut the leaf open and apply the gel directly to the afflicted part.

Cosmetic

Use the gel in homemade moisturizing creams, or use in shampoos for an itchy scalp. Used in aftersun lotion for its soothing properties.

CAUTION

Seek medical attention for severe burns. Avoid aloe vera in pregnancy. Some countries legally restrict the use of the purgative “bitter aloes.”

Flower
Golden, daisy-
like flowers.



Leaf
Soft, oval-shaped, and covered in fine hairs. Up to 7 in. long. Arranged in a rosette around the stem base.

ARNICA

This herb has a wide range of medicinal applications and has been used as a healing aid for many centuries. Today, however, its safety has been questioned in some countries. In the garden, this alpine plant is suitable for rock gardens and raised beds.

Arnica is one of the most famous plants in the herbal medicine cabinet. This aromatic and astringent herb stimulates the heart and immune system, and also acts as an anti-inflammatory and painkiller. It fights off bacterial and fungal infection and can be used externally for a wide range of conditions—most notably bruising, but also sprains, dislocations, chilblains, and varicose ulcers.

Cause of Controversy

In recent years, the safety of arnica remedies has been questioned, and they are now used only externally in the UK and are ruled unsafe in North America. In Germany and Austria, however, the dried flowers are still used commonly in a range of medicinal preparations. Arnica's most controversial application is as a short-term treatment for heart failure and coronary artery disease, but even used externally it can cause skin irritation. Homeopathic preparations aimed at speeding healing following an accident are regarded as safe.

Arnica Tea

The name “arnica” comes from the ancient Greek language, but its exact origins are uncertain. Some say it is derived from *arnakis*, meaning “lamb’s skin,” a reference to its soft leaves; others that it comes from *ptarmikos*, the Greek word for sneezing—one whiff of this aromatic herb can make you sneeze.

It was a staple household remedy in sixteenth-century Germany—the writer Goethe (1749–1832) was said to drink arnica tea to combat his angina—and it was later used in Italy too.

Alpine Climate

As *Arnica montana* is an alpine plant, it requires a cool, moist climate. It may do well in a rock garden or other area of raised ground. It is restricted by law in many countries—regulations should be checked before gathering it from the wild.

USES

PARTS USED:

Flowers.

PROPERTIES:

Astringent, stimulates heart and immune system, relieves pain, anti-inflammatory, combats bacterial and fungal infection.

USES OF THE HERB:

Medicinal

Taken internally for heart failure and coronary artery disease; externally for bruises, sprains, dislocations, chilblains, varicose ulcers, throat gargle. In homeopathy for epilepsy, sea sickness, and salmonella, and to encourage hair growth.

CAUTION

Toxic—for expert use only. Prescribed externally only in the UK and ruled unsafe in North America. May irritate skin—never apply to broken skin.

Basil

Leafy, aromatic herb rich in a complex mixture of aromatic oils. "Genovese," one of many variants of this widely grown plant, favored for Italian dishes, grows to about 18 in.

**Dried Leaf**

Can be crushed for use in cooking, or in potpourri. Infuse instead of fresh leaves as a tea that aids digestion and soothes respiratory problems.

**Greek Basil**

A miniature variant, also called "bush basil." Has a compact growth and very small leaves. Flavor is not so strong as some of the larger-leaved varieties.

BASIL

No other herb stands out quite like basil for its aroma—shred its leaves and the pungent smell fills the air, and it has a flavor to match.

Basil, also known as “sweet basil,” is one of the world’s major culinary herbs, and its aromatic leaves are well known for the seasoning they bring to many dishes. Originally from India, the herb has long been cultivated throughout Europe and the Mediterranean. It is particularly important in Italian cooking; it is a main ingredient of pesto sauce and tastes delicious with tomatoes, garlic, and aubergines. It also suits shellfish and can be added to omelets. Basil flavors soups and sauces and is used to make flavored oils and marinades or basil vinegar. It is rich in vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, and iron. Fresh basil is readily available to almost everyone since it can be raised in pots indoors.

Herb Tonic

Basil has an uplifting effect on the nervous system. The essential oil is often used in aromatherapy to treat depression and negativity. Because it can also ease overworked and stressed muscles, basil is popular with dancers and athletes. Basil is good for the digestive system. An infusion of the fresh leaves will help nervous dyspepsia, or you can chew on a small leaf to ease indigestion or flatulence. The tea is said to relieve nausea.

In the Garden

There are over one hundred sixty varieties of basil worldwide. Some can look very attractive outside in the herb garden, and different varieties can look appealing when grown side by side. The purple leaves of the Dark Opal or Purple Ruffle varieties are an excellent counterpart to the usual green. To add to the scent of the garden, lemon basil (*Ocimum basilicum* var *citriodorum*) is a good choice.

Although many insects are repelled by basil, it attracts butterflies and bees. In its native India, basil was considered sacred, second only to the lotus flower. And in other countries too it has the reputation of being a sacred herb. It was reputedly found growing around Christ's tomb after the resurrection, so in some Greek Orthodox churches, it is used to prepare holy water, and pots of basil are often set below the altar and at the foot of the pulpit.

USES

PARTS USED:

Leaves, stems, and flowers.

PROPERTIES:

Contains vitamins A and C and calcium and iron; the essential oil is uplifting.

USES OF THE HERB:

Culinary

Traditionally, basil should be torn with the fingers rather than chopped. It tastes delicious sprinkled over salads and is an important part of many sauces.

Medicinal

Make tea by pouring a cup of boiling water over three teaspoons of basil leaves as a remedy for colds, flu, catarrh, and digestive upsets. (Do not take basil medicinally if you are pregnant.)

Household

Pots of basil in the kitchen will keep flies away. A fresh leaf rubbed on an insect bite will help lessen the irritation.

CAUTION

Therapeutic doses of basil should not be used in pregnancy.



Dried Leaf

Like fresh leaves, can be used to flavor sauces, marinades, and so on. Use freshly dried because flavor fades.

Leaf

Aromatic, leathery, and shiny dark green with clear veining.



Stem

Young stems are purple-brown, becoming woody and gray with age.

BAY

The history of bay is well documented—the ancient Greeks crowned their athletes with wreaths of it, the Romans used it as a symbol of wisdom, and the French cooked with it.

Also known as sweet bay or bay laurel, the dried leaves of this herb tree are used as a seasoning in sweet and savory cooking all over the world. Today, the essential oil is widely used in commercial condiments, sauces, and meat products.

Tree of the Gods

In ancient times, bay was sacred to the gods. The roof of Apollo's temple at Delphi was entirely made of its leaves. Bay was also dedicated to the god of medicine and for centuries was used to ward off disease, especially in times of plague, when it was strewn around the house. A bay wreath became a mark of excellence for athletes and poets, and the Romans used it as a symbol of wisdom. The Latin for "crowned with laurel" survives in the modern "poet laureate," while the laurel wreath appears on sports trophies to this day.

Ancient Healer

The tree has always served a decorative purpose and thrives on being clipped. Since the sixteenth century, bushes have been carefully trained into ornamental shapes. One traditional design is the "ball bay," which is trimmed to a globe at the top of a smooth, bare trunk. This is the traditional tree often seen on patios or beside entrances.

The bay tree is one of two small shrubs or evergreen trees in this genus. It is native to the Mediterranean region and likes full sun—although it tolerates partial shade—and a rich soil. In colder climates, clipped bushes are best grown in a tub so that they can be moved to

a sheltered spot or indoors during winter. It is best grown from cuttings.

USES

PARTS USED:

Leaves.

PROPERTIES:

Aromatic, culinary flavoring.

USES OF THE HERB:

Culinary

Use bay leaves as part of a bouquet garni for soups, stews, and sauces. Add to stocks, marinades and stews, curry, and poached fish. Remove leaves before serving. Place in rice jar to flavor rice. Heat in milk to flavor custards and puddings. Use to flavor vinegar.

Medicinal

Use an infusion of the leaves as a digestive stimulant. Apply infusion to scalp to relieve dandruff. Essential oil is good for massaging sprains and rheumatic pains. Make sure the oil is diluted by mixing it with a "carrier oil" such as sweet almond beforehand.

Cosmetic

Add a decoction of bay to bath water to tone the skin and relieve aches.

Decorative

Clipped and trained bay trees in tubs are an elegant and traditional decoration for doorways and house walls. Use branches in full leaf for wreaths.

Household

Crumble dried leaves into potpourri. Hang branches up to freshen the air.



Leaves

Oval leaves are dark green with purplish tinge. Can be dried for use in potpourri.

Stem

Hard, dark green, and hairy, with purplish tinge where leaves join.



Seeds

Small dark-brown seeds can be collected for sowing.



BERGAMOT

The aromatic leaves and edible flowers of bergamot can be used for flavoring and decorating food. The plant also dries well, with the flowers retaining some of their color.

This North American woodland herb became a popular garden plant in Europe after explorers sent back the seeds. After the Boston Tea Party in 1773, when rioting settlers threw several hundred chests of Indian tea into the harbor, bergamot was used to make a substitute tea known as Oswego tea. Bergamot's Latin name, *Monarda*, recalls the Spanish botanist Dr. Nicholas Monardes, who wrote a book about the plants of America in 1569. He named this herb "bergamot" because the scent of its leaves resembles the Italian Bergamot orange (*Citrus bergamia*) from which an essential oil is made.

The bergamot plant usually has vivid scarlet flowers, although there are varieties that bear pink, purple, mauve, and white blooms. Humming-birds are attracted to the flowers, and any garden featuring bergamot will attract more than its fair share of butterflies and bees. This gives rise to another popular name for bergamot—"bee balm."

Garden Beauty

The plant has claw-shaped, tubular flowers that bloom from July until September, when they can be harvested whole and preserved. The leaves of the plant are strongly aromatic (the aroma is strongest when the plant is young). This makes bergamot a good choice for planting along paths. As people brush past, it releases a delicious scent.

The edible flowers can be used to decorate salads. The leaves have a strong flavor and can be used sparingly in salads and stuffings. Dried leaves can be infused in water or milk. Native Americans used bergamot for chest and throat complaints.

USES

PARTS USED:

Leaves and flowers.

PROPERTIES:

Aromatic.

USES OF THE HERB:

Decorative

Use in flower arrangements or to add scent and color to potpourri mixtures.

Culinary

Add the leaves to fruit salad and use the flowers to decorate puddings. Leaves can also be added to homemade lemonade to enhance the flavor. Add flowers to salads.

Medicinal

Drink an infusion for minor digestive complaints.

Household

Attracts a host of butterflies and bees to the garden.

Stem
Twining, flexible stems.



Fruit
Berry-like fruits are
pungently fragrant
and wrinkled.

Leaves
Glossy, oval, dark leaves have
conspicuous veining.



Peppercorns
The berries are green when
immature and red when ripe.



Pepper Mill
An airtight pepper mill provides the best way to retain
the flavor of dried peppercorns until they are needed.
Most are adjustable for fine or coarse grinding.



BLACK PEPPER

The ancient Greeks and Romans used pepper as a condiment and a medicine. Later, it was a trading currency along the spice route. Today it is the most widely used spice in the world.

The familiar condiment that appears in kitchens and on dining tables all over the world—in either a black or white form, whole, ground, or powdered—comes from the pungent fruit of a tropical, climbing plant. The vine, *Piper nigrum*, is a glossy-leaved species whose small, aromatic berry-fruits are sun-dried when green and immature to form black peppercorns. Fruits that are left to ripen and are then dried before their outer layers are removed form white peppercorns, which have a less aromatic taste than their black counterparts. Peppercorns are also picked when green and are preserved in various ways for use where a milder spice is preferred. Pink peppercorns actually come from a different species and have been thought to be slightly toxic. There is also no connection with the glossy pepper fruits, including salad peppers and the many varieties of chillies, that belong to the genus *Capsicum*.

Ancient Spice

Native to Asia, especially India, Malaysia, and Indonesia, this is one of the oldest known spices in the world, used as a medicine and condiment in the times of the Greek physician Hippocrates. Pepper formed a vital trading commodity along the ancient spice routes and, later, across the vast trading sea routes traversed by European explorers. The term “peppercorn rent” comes from its value as a trading currency.

Worldwide Favor

Today pepper is no less valued, in every type of cuisine, around the world. It can be added to a vast range of savory dishes, and the

warming and revitalizing properties of black pepper have been put to good use in both Western and Eastern medicine as well as in aromatherapy. This stimulating expectorant can be particularly effective in treating indigestion, gas, colds, and congestion, and is especially pleasant mixed with rose extracts. This is a species that demands tropical conditions. It can be cultivated, but not for its fruits, in a greenhouse or across a trellis.

USES

PARTS USED:

Berries.

PROPERTIES:

Aromatic, stimulant, expectorant.

USES OF THE HERB:

Culinary

Traditionally used ground and whole, dried, and fresh (green) in all kinds of savory dishes; ground black pepper on sliced strawberries and black pepper cookies is an unusually sweet treat. Whole peppercorns can be infused when making sauces, and a mild green fresh peppercorn sauce or coating complements rich meat and fish dishes.

Medicinal

Black pepper is used in aromatherapy to revitalize, while this warming stimulant and expectorant, with antiseptic properties, can help colds and sinusitis, nausea, indigestion, gas, and food poisoning.

Household

Ground or powdered pepper makes a natural deterrent in the house or garden for unwanted mice, cats, and dogs.

Fruit

Sweet-tasting, blue-black berries with grayish sheen; ripen in late summer.



Stem

Many hairless branches, short and stiff, up to 24 in. in height.

Leaf

Bright green, egg-shaped leaves with short stalks and toothed margins.



Berries

The color of the berries (fruit) changes as they ripen.

BLUEBERRY

This shrub is widely cultivated commercially for its berries, which are a culinary favorite. The berries and leaves also have medicinal applications, including the treatment of skin problems.

Blueberries belong to the same family as bilberries (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) and share many of the same culinary and medicinal uses. Delicious to eat when freshly picked, they will keep in the refrigerator for several days and feature in many favorite recipes—including blueberry cheesecake, blueberry muffins, and blueberry pancakes. These berries are perfect for syrups or jam-making, requiring less added sugar than many other fruits—adding a dash of lemon or lime juice gives them a sharper taste. They can also be added to thick yogurt.

Berry Benefits

Like bilberries, blueberries are astringent and cooling, with a diuretic effect (and laxative in large quantities). Blueberry preparations can lower blood sugar levels and are taken for diabetes as well as for edema, anemia, urinary complaints, dysentery, diarrhea, and intestinal problems in general. Applied externally, a decoction of the fruit also soothes hemorrhoids, burns, eczema, and other skin ailments, and makes a good gargle or mouthwash for inflamed gums. The juice is said to soothe inflamed eyes. Extracts are rich in anthocyanidins and are taken as supplements to maintain health of peripheral circulation and skin collagen. Bilberries were known to the ancient Greek physician Dioscorides, who recommended them for stomach upsets and intestinal problems. The juice became a folk remedy for improving night vision. The berries were once commonly prescribed for dropsy and scurvy—a condition caused by chronic shortage of vitamin C, often suffered by sailors. The fruit also yields a dark-blue or purple dye.

Mass Cultivation

Highbush blueberries, derived from *Vaccinium corymbosum*, are the preferred crop for mass commercial cultivation, and rabbit-eye blueberries (*Vaccinium ashei*) are also important economically.

USES

PARTS USED:

Leaves, fruits.

PROPERTIES:

Astringent, cooling, diuretic, laxative, lowers blood sugar, and has a tonic effect on the blood.

USES OF THE HERB:

Medicinal

Taken internally for diabetes (leaves), anemia, edema, dysentery, diarrhea and urinary problems. Applied to hemorrhoids, burns (fruit), eczema, and other skin complaints. Made into mouthwash for inflamed gums. Soothes sore eyes. Proven to combat typhoid and bacilli of the colon. Extracts maintain peripheral circulation (fine blood vessels) and skin collagen.

Culinary

Fruit is delicious fresh or made into jam, pies, puddings, syrups, cheese-cake, muffins, or pancakes.

Leaf

Although covered with prickly hairs, leaves are edible, with medicinal and cosmetic uses.



Stem

Sturdy, round stems are hollow and hairy.



Seeds

Large, dark brown seeds remain viable for several years. Contain starflower oil that has medicinal uses.

BORAGE

This attractive herb with its colorful flowers looks good in a perennial border and can be put to good use in the kitchen.

Borage is an attractive, flowering plant with a wide range of culinary and medicinal uses. It is traditionally reputed to bestow both courage and happiness—the Celtic word *borrach* means courage. In ancient times, borage was used to make herbal wine, which the ancient Greek poet Homer is supposed to have called the wine of forgetfulness. In medieval England, borage flowers were floated on the stirrup-cups given to departing Crusader knights.

Borage flowers are edible, as are borage leaves, which have a cucumber flavor. They are normally a vividly bright blue color and often appear in illustrated medieval texts and tapestries. The plants may sometimes produce pink or white flowers. Once dried, borage flowers make an ideal addition to potpourri.

Traditionally, the herb is well known for its ability to calm anxiety and nervous disorders. Recent medical research has shown that borage's high concentrations of minerals and complex compounds may work on the adrenal glands and have a stimulating effect similar to that of adrenaline, the source of courage.

Native Roots

Originally a native of the Mediterranean and western Asia, and often found growing on wasteland and rough ground, this herb thrives best on rich, moist, well-drained soil. The plants tend to have a long, robust taproot, which means that transplanting is seldom successful and growing in pots or containers is not generally advised. The best situations for this plant are herb gardens or perennial borders. However, a few seeds can be sown to produce small plants for winter use, as long as they are kept indoors in a light, warm spot.

USES

PARTS USED:

Leaves, flowers, seeds, oil.

PROPERTIES:

Cooling, saline, diuretic; mildly sedative and antidepressant.

USES OF THE HERB:

Culinary

Use flowers in salads as a garnish or crystallize for cake decorations. Add young leaves to summer drinks. Chop leaves to use in ravioli stuffing.

Medicinal

Use leaves in a poultice to soothe bruises. Seed oil may be effective in treating premenstrual tension and lowering blood pressure.

Cosmetic

Add leaves to a face pack for dry skin or mix with barley and use in bath bags.

Household

Flowers attract bees to gardens. When planted near tomatoes, helps to control tomato worm.

CAUTION

May irritate the skin or cause allergies. All members of the borage family are restricted in some countries for medicinal use because they may cause liver damage.

Leaf

Shiny and pointed, up to 4 in. long. Red when young, with a strong camphor aroma.

**Stem**

Smooth, pale green. Trunk reaches 100 ft. in height. Wood boiled to extract crystallized oil of camphor.

Camphor Oil

Pungent, aromatic, and yellow in color—is produced in the nooks and crannies of the tree's trunk.



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