

BALM =====

CULTIVATION: ===== Lemon balm is a sweet-smelling perennial, on slightly hairy square whitish stem, branching near the top. Grows up to 2 feet in height. Flowers occasionally with pinkish or yellow flowers.

Requires full sun with midday shade. Some shelter in cooler climates. Grows in any soil. Prefers rich, moist soil. Sow in spring, divide plant or take stem cuttings in spring or autumn. Thin and transplant to 2 feet apart. Small plants can be grown indoors. Germination time is about 14 days, and plant matures enough for use in 60 days. Grows in zone 3-10.

Pick leaves anytime, but handle gently to avoid bruising. Their flavor is best when flowers begin to open. Cut for drying or freezing as flower buds develop for maximum amount of flavor. Freeze leaves and flowers, this will preserve the powerful aroma and flavor, due to the volatile oil not having been allowed to evaporate. Much of its therapeutic value is lost when drying and storing.

CULINARY USES: ===== Lemon balm has many uses in the kitchen. Use the refreshing, lemon flavored leaves fresh in salads, add generously to a white sauce for fish, and spread over chicken before roasting. Lemon balm and thyme are obvious choices for most types of fish.

Finely chopped leaves add a lemony sweetness to mayonnaise, sauces and stuffings. You can also add it to fruit salads and custards. Freeze in ice cubes to add to drinks.

Be generous and adventurous with lemon balm.

For the most lemony flavor, crush balm leaves before you use them. Crushing tears cells, releasing the plant's flavorful scented oil.

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For a lemony tea, pour a cup of boiling water over one or two tablespoon of crushed fresh or dried balm leaves. let the tea steep 5-10 minutes.

MEDICAL USES: ===== Lemon balm is commonly used as a sedative and tonic for the treatment of minor gastric-disturbance, nausea, feverish colds, chronic bronchial catarrh, and headaches.

An infusion of 1 ounce of lemon balm to 1 pint of water is recommended as a carminative and diaphoretic. It is valuable as a hot drink at night to fight insomnia. It can also be helpful in relieving tension with its mild antidepressant action. It combines well with lavender flowers and linden blossom. Take a cup of mixed tea in the morning, evening, and when required.

Balm contains a chemical called Polyphenols that may help fight several infection causing bacteria. Balm also contains Eugenol, an anesthetic, that may help relieve wound pain.

For a light lemon-tasting infusion which may help sooth the stomach, fight infections, or ease menstrual pain, use 2 teaspoon of leaves per cup of water. Steep 10-20 minutes. Drink up to 3 cups a day.

WARNING: ===== Generally regarded as safe, for healthy nonpregnant, nonnursing adults.

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OTHER USES: ===== Planted in your garden, it will attract bees. Use well dried lemon balm in potpourris and pillows. It is used frequently in French liqueurs.

COSMETIC USES: ===== When crushed, the leaves smell and taste like lemon, and from them is produced a volatile oil used in perfumes and cosmetics.

Lemon balm can be used for an aromatic and stimulating bath, or to condition greasy hair. Tie 1/4 cup of crushed balm leaves into a bag. Let the water run through the bag until the tub is filled.

HERBAL BATH INFUSION : Infuse 10 ounces of the dried herb, or a handful of fresh herbs to 2 1/2 cups of boiling water. Leave for 10 minutes, then strain and pour into the tub.