

Marjoram

If this herb was not already confused with oregano often enough by lay-people and gardeners alike, its botanical name *Origanum Marjoranum* only further seals its fate. We can here look to thank the Greeks who gave us its botanical name, which is derived from 'oros' and 'ganos', meaning "joy of the mountain,". In their defence, the herbs are in fact quite closely related and are often defined as the wild and domestic version of the one plant. It is therefore not surprising to discover some common uses, yet very different tastes and medicinal natures. Whilst Oregano can be very pungent and spicy, the essence of marjoram is a gentle warmth, which helps explain why in ancient Greece marjoram was used in oils to massage into the skin to relieve pain.

Legend also tells us that sweet marjoram was created by Aphrodite as a symbol of happiness, and bridal couples in Greece and Rome were crowned with its garlands to ensure a happy marriage.

The ancient use to relieve pain has been tried and tested true throughout the ages, with marjoram having proved itself a powerful and effective antispasmodic. This is the best way to remember how to apply this household culinary agent, for wherever it is used in the body, it is always seen to exert a calming, relaxing and anti-spasmodic action. When applied externally marjoram tea compresses will help with aching, tense and stiff muscles, and may be used to assist in the recovery process of some injuries.

Similarly it is useful for the treatment of chronic migraines when applied in either a hot or cold compress to the back of the neck and temples. When hot towels are soaked in a strong decoction of marjoram tea it is often found useful for lumbago and sciatica. Finally, when combined with lavender, an external compress may be wrapped around painful joints for swollen arthritic conditions and tendonitis.

Another area that marjoram may be safely employed is in the treatment and management of PMS. Here its gentle antispasmodic action may help relieve the pains of uterine cramps and lower back pain. Once again this may be done using external compresses, but will often respond more quickly to a hot cup of tea. Its action in the abdomen is not limited to the uterus however, for griping colic should also respond. Perhaps this is why Aristotle recommended it as an antidote for poisoning, claiming that tortoises which swallowed a snake would immediately eat wild marjoram as an antidote to prevent death. For regular household stomach upsets that don't involve swallowing snakes however, adding a little peppermint or ginger may be enough, but for very young infants, it is best to try chamomile or fennel seed first.

Yet another area that marjoram may be employed to great effect is in infectious diseases. In addition to its general warming effect that is useful in a cold with aches and shivers, marjoram has a great history of use in spasmodic coughs. For this reason it may be used to combat deep hacking coughs, especially when there is not an overly large amount of mucus present. This would also qualify marjoram as a possible candidate in spasmodic asthma, particularly when stress is found to be a major trigger.

This herb has also been used by opera singers to preserve the voice and prevent hoarseness, a quality that may be employed with generous amounts of honey in a hot drink during an irritating cough and sore throat.

Finally, marjoram is also classified as a diaphoretic as it stimulates perspiration when drunk hot, which also helps to rid the body of toxins through the skin. This last quality assists in reducing fevers and helps to relieve flu like symptoms.

In order to enjoy the full breadth of this amazing culinary herbs medicinal actions however, ALWAYS buy organic.

- The Barefoot Doctor