

Catnip (*Nepeta cataria*)  
Common Name: Catmint.

Location: This herb can be found in North America and Europe.  
Description: For medicinal purposes, the top portions of this herb are clipped in the fall months.  
Properties: This herb can be used to expel gases from the body and to reduce fevers.  
Uses: Use this herb to fight influenza and insomnia as well as fever sicknesses.  
Doses: Use this herb in tea form.

Catnip  
MEDICINAL: Catnip is effective alone or in herbal remedies for colds, flu, fevers, upset stomach, and insomnia. Particularly good for children with upset stomachs in a very mild infusion.  
MAGICKAL: Use the large leaves, well dried, to mark pages in magickal books. Use in conjunction with rose petals in love sachets. It will also create a psychic bond between you and your cat. Grow near your home to attract luck and good spirits.  
GROWING: Catnip will grow in most soils, and tends to enjoy a bit of the dry spells once it is established. It grows throughout North America, and is a perennial reaching to 3 feet high.

Catnip (*Nepeta cataria*): Venus, Water. Creates a psychic bond between cat and 'owner'. Used in love charms and incenses.

#### **Also known as**

*Nepeta cataria*, Catmint, Catnep, Catswort, Field Balm, Menta De Gato.

#### **Introduction**

Catnip is native to Southern Europe, but is widely naturalized all over Europe and North America, where some of the best quality in the world is grown in the state of Washington. It is a gray-green perennial that grows up to three feet high and looks incredibly similar to species of the mint family, which it is a part of. Catnip is, as its name suggests, the herb of choice for cats. A member of the mint, catnip attracts cats of all breeds and sizes, who often run up to the herb, paw it, roll in it, meow loudly, and then suddenly lose interest in the herb for hours or days until sensitivity to the herb "resets" itself. Catnip has also been used as a sedative to help with insomnia, producing similar effects as Valerian.

#### **Constituents**

Nepetalactone, essential oil

#### **Parts Used**

The leaf, dried, cut, and powdered.

#### **Typical Preparations**

As a tea it imparts a pleasant mint flavor. It can also be taken as an extract or lightly sprinkled on food, or as an herbal pillow for cats. It has also been used as a flavoring in sauces, soups, and stews.

#### **Summary**

Scientists have ascertained that the feline reaction to catnip is due to its content of nepetalactone. The herb is also strongly antifungal and a bactericide for *Staphylococcus aureus*, as well as a close chemical relative to a number of insect repellants that affect mosquitoes and termites. Folklore of the early American settlers suggested that they felt that ingesting catnip would somehow make even the kindest person mean. It was consumed thereafter by hangmen to "get in the mood".

#### **Precautions**

Not recommended for use while pregnant.

**Botanical: Nepeta cataria (LINN.)**

**Family: N.O. Labiatae**

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---**Synonym**---Catnep.

---**Parts Used**---Leaves, herb.

---**Habitat**---Catmint or Catnep, a wild English plant belonging to the large family *Labiatae*, of which the Mints and Deadnettles are also members, is generally distributed throughout the central and the southern counties of England, in hedgerows, borders of fields, and on dry banks and waste ground, especially in chalky and gravelly soil. It is less common in the north, very local in Scotland and rare in Ireland, but of frequent occurrence in the whole of Europe and temperate Asia, and also common in North America, where originally, however, it was an introduced species.

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---**Description**---The root is perennial and sends up square, erect and branched stems, 2 to 3 feet high, which are very leafy and covered with a mealy down. The heartshaped, toothed leaves are also covered with a soft, close down, especially on the under sides, which are quite white with it, so that the whole plant has a hoary, greyish appearance, as though it had had dust blown over it.

The flowers grow on short footstalks in dense whorls, which towards the summit of the stem are so close as almost to form a spike. They are in bloom from July to September. The individual flowers are small, the corollas two-lipped, the upper lip straight, of a whitish or pale pink colour, dotted with red spots, the anthers a deep red colour. The calyx tube has fifteen ribs, a distinguishing feature of the genus *Nepeta*, to which this species belongs.

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---**History**---The plant has an aromatic, characteristic odour, which bears a certain resemblance to that of both Mint and Pennyroyal. It is owing to this scent that it has a strange fascination for cats, who will destroy any plant of it that may happen to be bruised. There is an old saying about this plant:

'If you set it, the cats will eat it,

If you sow it, the cats don't know it.'

And it seems to be a fact that plants transplanted are always destroyed by cats unless protected, but they never meddle with the plants raised from seed, being only attracted to it when it is in a withering state, or when the peculiar scent of the plant is excited by being bruised in gathering or transplanting.

In France the leaves and young shoots are used for seasoning, and it is regularly grown amongst kitchen herbs for the purpose. Both there and in this country, it has an old reputation for its value as a medicinal herb. Miss Bardswell, in *The Herb Garden*, writes of Catmint:

'Before the use of tea from China, our English peasantry were in the habit of brewing Catmint Tea, which they said was quite as pleasant and a good deal more wholesome. Ellen Montgomery in *The Wide, Wide World* made Catmint Tea for Miss Fortune when she was ill. It is stimulating. The root when chewed is said to make the most gentle person fierce and quarrelsome, and there is a legend of a certain hangman who could never screw up his courage to the point of hanging anybody till he had partaken of it. Rats dislike the plant particularly, and will not approach it even when driven by hunger.'

This dislike of rats for Catmint might well be utilized by growing it round other valuable crops as a protective screen.

Closely allied to the Catmint is the Ground Ivy (*Nepeta glechoma*, Benth.), named *Glechoma hederacea* by Linnaeus.

---**Cultivation**---Catmint is easily grown in any garden soil, and does not require moisture in the same way as the other Mints. It may be increased by dividing the plants in spring, or by sowing seeds at the same period. Sow in rows, about 20 inches apart, thinning out the seedlings to about the same distance apart as the plants attain a considerable size. They require no attention, and will last for several years if the ground is kept free from weeds. The germinating power of the seeds lasts five years.

Catmint forms a pretty border plant, especially in conjunction with Hyssop, the soft blues blending pleasingly, and it is also a suitable plant for the rock garden.

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**---Part Used Medicinally---**The flowering tops are the part utilized in medicine and are harvested when the plant is in full bloom in August.

**---Medicinal Action and Uses---**Carminative, tonic, diaphoretic, refrigerant and slightly emmenagogue, specially antispasmodic, and mildly stimulating.

Producing free perspiration, it is very useful in colds. Catnep Tea is a valuable drink in every case of fever, because of its action in inducing sleep and producing perspiration without increasing the heat of the system. It is good in restlessness, colic, insanity and nervousness, and is used as a mild nervine for children, one of its chief uses being, indeed, in the treatment of children's ailments. The infusion of 1 OZ. to a pint of boiling water may be taken by adults in doses of 2 tablespoonsful, by children in 2 or 3 teaspoonsful frequently, to relieve pain and flatulence. An injection of Catnep Tea is also used for colicky pains.

The herb should always be *infused*, boiling will spoil it. Its qualities are somewhat volatile, hence when made it should be covered up.

The tea may be drunk freely, but if taken in very large doses when warm, it frequently acts as an emetic.

It has proved efficacious in nervous headaches and as an emmenagogue, though for the latter purpose, it is preferable to use Catnep, not as a warm tea, but to express the juice of the green herb and take it in tablespoonful doses, three times a day.

An injection of the tea also relieves headache and hysteria, by its immediate action upon the sacral plexus. The young tops, made into a conserve, have been found serviceable for nightmare.

Catnep may be combined with other agents of a more decidedly diaphoretic nature. Equal parts of warm Catnep tea and Saffron are excellent in scarlet-fever and small-pox, as well as colds and hysterics. It will relieve painful swellings when applied in the form of a poultice or fomentation.

Old writers recommended a decoction of the herb, sweetened with honey for relieving a cough, and Culpepper tells us also that 'the juice drunk in wine is good for bruises,' and that 'the green leaves bruised and made into an ointment is effectual for piles,' and that 'the head washed with a decoction taketh away scabs, scurf, etc.'