

Marjoram Herb Profile

Also known as

Origanum majorana, garden marjoram, knotted marjoram, majoran, majorana, majorana herb, majorana hortensis, marjolaine, Mejorana, and sweet marjoram.

Introduction

Marjoram is a culinary and medicinal herb in the mint family. It needs a hot climate to develop its full aroma, but it loses some of its flavor when it is dried. Marjoram goes well with thyme, bay leaves, black pepper, and juniper berries. Marjoram is a Greek word meaning "Joy of the Mountain". According to Greek myth, Aphrodite said that the smell of marjoram was the smell of impending good luck. Greeks also believed that if it was growing on a grave, it was a sign that the departed soul had found happiness. Throughout the middle ages it was worn by bridal couples to signify love, honor, and happiness. It was used in England for many years as an ingredient in snuff, then as a somewhat exotic flavoring for beer.

Constituents

Essential oil with alpha-pinene, alpha-terpinene, beta-sitosterol, cavracol, caryophyllene, citral, estragole, eugenol, geraniol, limonene, niacin, oleic acids, rosmarinic acid, tannins, ursolic acid, vitamin C, and zinc.

Parts Used

Leaves.

Typical Preparations

Essential oil, infusions, teas, poultices.

Summary

According to a review in the journal Evidence-Based Alternative and Complementary Medicine published in June 2005, the essential oil of marjoram is known to reduce anxiety and fatigue (as documented in studies published in Japanese). The British Journal of Nutrition reported in March 2005 that consuming a salad served with an oil and vinegar dressing flavored with marjoram offers the equivalent antioxidant power of 200 milligrams of vitamin C. Contemporary scientific research, however, has not examined the traditional uses of marjoram in herbal healing. The traditional uses of marjoram include preventing spasms in the digestive tract, relieving dry cough, relieving pain on bruises, lumbago, and sprains, breaking up congestion caused by coughs and colds, and encouraging lactation in nursing mothers. Several European legends tell that if anoint yourself with marjoram before you go to sleep, you will dream of your future spouse. The famous herbalist Nicholas Culpeper said that it "helps all diseases of the chest which hinder the freeness of breathing".

Precautions

Women who experience heavy menstruation should avoid marjoram. The herb is not recommended for infants and small children.

Botanical: *Origanum marjorana* (LINN.)

Family: N.O. Labiatae

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---**Synonyms**---Knotted Marjoram. *Marjorana hortensis*.

---**Parts Used**---Herb, leaves.

Sweet or Knotted Marjoram is not an annual, but is usually treated as such, as the plants - native to Portugal - will not stand the winter elsewhere, so must be sown every year.

Seeds may be sown, for an early supply, in March, on a gentle hot-bed and again, in a warm position, in light soil, in the open ground during April. Plants do well if sown in April, though they are long in germinating. The seed is small and should be sown either in drills, 9 inches apart, or broadcast, on the surface, trodden, raked evenly and watered in dry weather. On account of the slowness of germination, care should be taken that the seedlings are not choked with weeds, which being of much quicker growth are likely to do so if not destroyed. They should be removed by the hand, until the plants are large enough to use the small hoe with safety. Seed may also be sown early in May. In common with other aromatic herbs, such as Fennel, Basil, Dill, etc., it is not subject to the attacks of birds, as many other seeds are. When about an inch high, thin out to 6 or 8 inches apart each way. It begins to flower in July, when it is cut for use, and obtains its name of Knotted Marjoram from the flowers being collected into roundish close heads like knots.

Marjoram has been cultivated on a small scale at Sfax, Tunis, for a long time, and is called by the natives 'Khezama' (the Arab name for lavender).

Before the War, the herb was bought by agents and exported to Marseilles and other places. The plant is suitable to the sandy soil of the country.

The Marjoram plants are obtained either by division of clumps in winter, or from seeds planted in parallel lines 2 metres apart, between the almond and olive trees; and the soil, being of necessity worked for cultivation of the trees, this also serves to fertilize the Marjoram. One cutting of plant-clumps is best, a second one weakens it. The stems are cut about 10 cms. from the ground, dried in the sun on earth which has been previously beaten slightly. The leaves are separated from the stems by being beaten with staves; they are discoloured by the sun, broken and mixed with the debris of stems of which the odour is less strong.

Drying in the shade obtains more aromatic and less broken leaves, with less impurities.

---**Medicinal Action and Uses**---The medicinal qualities of the oil extracted from Sweet Marjoram -

Oleum majoranae - are similar to that of the Wild Marjoram. Fifteen ounces of the oil are yielded by 150 lb. of the fresh herb. On being kept, it assumes a solid form. It is used as an external application for sprains, bruises, etc., and also as an emmenagogue. In powdered form the herb forms part of certain Sneezing Powders.

---**Other Species**---In addition to the species just mentioned, others are cultivated in this country as ornamental plants, such as *O. Dictamnus*, the Dittany of Crete, which has roundish leaves thickly invested with white down, and flowers in drooping spikes; and *O. sipyleum*, which is similar, but taller and less woolly. These last are popularly called Hop Plants, and are often seen in cottage windows.

RECIPE

Aromatic Herbaceous Seasoning

Take of nutmegs and mace 1 OZ. each, of cloves and peppercorns 2 OZ. of each, 1 OZ. of dried bay-leaves, 3 OZ. of basil, the same of *Marjoram*, 2 OZ. of winter savoury, and 3 OZ. of thyme, 1/2 OZ. of cayenne pepper, the same of grated lemon-peel, and 2 cloves of garlic; all these ingredients must be well pulverized in a mortar, and sifted through a fine wire sieve, and put away in dry corked bottles for use.

The following is from Halliwell's *Popular Rhymes and Superstitions*:

'On St. Luke's Day, says Mother Bunch, 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 future partner "that is to be":

St. Luke, St. Luke, be kind to me,

In dreams let me my true love see.

If a girl desires to obtain this information, let her seek for a green peascod in which there are full 9 peas, and write on a piece of paper -

Come in, my dear,

And do not fear;

which paper she must enclose in the peascod, and lay it under the door. The first person who comes into the room will be her husband.'

Shakespeare may allude to this in *As You Like It* (ii. iv.) when he talks about the wooing of a peascod.