

Marshmallow Root (*Althaea officinalis*)

Common Name: Althea root.

Description: The root of this herb is used medicinally.

Properties: This herb is known for its ability to ease pain and inflammation for illnesses related to mucus membranes.

Uses: Use marshmallow root to treat laryngitis, coughs, Crohn's disease, peptic ulcer, mastitis, psoriasis and eczema.

Doses: This herb can be found as a powder, tinctures, fluid extracts and creams.

Warnings: If you have diabetes avoid the use of this herb.

As a poultice, mallow leaves will draw out boils and pus from old infections. Put a few large leaves in your blender with some mineral water, and apply the green, goopy mask to your teenager's acne for cleansing and healing. If he or she objects, add a drop of essential oil of lavender to make it smell good. Allow it to dry, then rinse off. The skin will look brighter and feel silky.

Rashes and burns can be successfully treated with mallow leaves, crushed or blended. When gathering nettles, I look for a nice big mallow leaf to wrap around the hairy, stinging stalks so I can cut them easily. If I do get stung, a poultice of crushed mallow will take away the irritation quickly.

Mallow Soup (serves 6 - 8)

1 large onion
1 large tomato
2 bell peppers, preferable of different colors
½ bunch of celery
4 carrots
3 large potatoes
3 garlic cloves
olive oil to cover the bottom of your soup kettle
6 cups of water, enriched with 2 Tblsp. of good-quality soy sauce or the same quantity of chicken broth
2 tsp. salt plus black pepper to taste.
2 large handfuls of clean mallow leaves and/or roots

1. Dice the onion; chop tomato, peppers, celery, carrots and potatoes.
2. Sauté the onions, adding the other vegetables as the onions start to wilt
3. Chop the garlic finely; add to the sautéed vegetables when they are looking golden and start smelling cooked.
4. Add water and seasonings; simmer for 15-20 minutes. A nice touch at this point is to blend the cooked vegetables, with some of the soup, and return the blended mass to the pot. Children especially appreciate blended soups.

5. Chop the Mallow into narrow ribbons: if using roots, slice finely. Add to the pot and cook a further 10 minutes.
Serve with croutons, or chopped parsley, or simply on its own.

Marshmallow Root and Powder Profile

Also known as

Althaea officinalis, althaea root or althaea root, mallow root, mortification root, Schloss tea, sweet weed, Hock herb.

Introduction

Marshmallow is a perennial herb native throughout damp areas of northern Europe and western Asia. It is now naturalized to the Atlantic coast of the United States and used as an ornamental for its pointed foliage and purple flowers. References to marshmallow root as a healing herb are found in Homer's Iliad, written over 2,800 years ago. Its genus ("first") name *Althaea* comes from the Greek *altho*, to cure, and its order name, Malvaceae, is derived from the Greek *malake*, soft. Marshmallow root was widely used in traditional Greek medicine. The use of the herb spread from Greece to Arabia and India, where it became an important herb in the Ayurvedic and Unani healing traditions. All of these traditions used marshmallow as a soothing agent: demulcent, diuretic, emollient, and vulnerary.

Constituents

Mucilage (arabinogalactans and galacturonorhamnan), the amino acid asparagines, antioxidant flavonoids 8-hydroxyluteolin and 8-b-gentiobioside, coumarins, fats, kaempferol, phenolic acids, quercetin, sugars, tannins, and volatile oil.

Parts Used

The dried root. Reputable suppliers test the product for its ability to swell when mixed with water. Marshmallow root does not swell as much as marshmallow leaf when placed in water.

Typical Preparations

Cold macerations, warm infusions, tincture, and fluid extract or capsulation.

Summary

Marshmallow root relieves irritation by coating inflamed surfaces. Its primary use in modern herbal medicine is to relieve sore throat, but it also relieves perianal inflammation (when taken orally) caused by severe diarrhea.

Precautions

Marshmallow root is completely non-toxic, but its mucilage can interfere with the absorption of other medicines if taken at the same time. The asparagine in the root can cause a mild odor in the urine, but has no other physiological effect.

Marshmallow Leaf Profile

Also known as

Althaea officinalis, althaea leaf or althaea leaf, mortification root, Schloss tea, sweet weed, Hock herb.

Introduction

Marshmallow is a perennial herb native throughout damp areas of northern Europe and western Asia. It is now naturalized to the Atlantic coast of the United States and used as an ornamental for its pointed foliage and purple flowers. References to marshmallow leaf as a healing herb are found in Homer's Iliad, written over 2,800 years ago. Its genus name *Althaea* comes from the Greek *altho*, to cure, and its order name, *Malvaceae*, is derived from the Greek *malake*, which means soft. Marshmallow leaf was widely used in traditional Greek medicine. The use of the herb spread from Greece to Arabia and India, where it became an important herb in the Ayurvedic and Unani healing traditions. All of these traditions used marshmallow as a soothing agent: demulcent, diuretic, emollient, and vulnerary. The German E Commission wrote that both the leaf and the root were good for sore throat and dry cough. Pliny the Elder believed that mallows could cure all the diseases of man and even wrote that "whoever shall take a spoonful of the mallows shall that day be free from all diseases that came to him". The Romans used it primarily as a roasted vegetable, and was mentioned in both Arabic and Chinese literature as a good food during times of famine.

Constituents

Mucilage (arabinogalactans and galacturonorhamnan), antioxidant flavonoids 8-hydroxyluteolin and 8-b-gentiobioside, phenolic acids, tannins, and volatile oil.

Parts Used

The dried leaf. Reputable suppliers test the product for its ability to swell when mixed with water.

Typical Preparations

Cold macerations, warm infusions, tincture, and fluid extract. May also be taken as a capsule.

Summary

Marshmallow leaf relieves irritation by coating inflamed surfaces. Its primary use in modern herbal medicine is to relieve sore throat, but it also relieves perianal inflammation (when taken orally) caused by severe diarrhea. Marshmallow leaf coats better than marshmallow root, but marshmallow root has greater antibacterial and anti-allergy effects.

Precautions

Marshmallow leaf is completely non-toxic, but its mucilage can interfere with the absorption of other medicines if taken at the same time.

---**Synonyms**---Mallards. Mauls. Schloss Tea. Cheeses. Mortification Koot.

(*French*) Guimauve.

---**Parts Used**---Leaves, root, flowers.

---**Habitat**---Marsh Mallow is a native of most countries of Europe, from Denmark southward. It grows in salt marshes, in damp meadows, by the sides of ditches, by the sea and on the banks of tidal rivers. In this country it is local, but occurs in most of the maritime counties in the south of England, ranging as far north as Lincolnshire. In Scotland it has been introduced.

---**Description**---The stems, which die down in the autumn, are erect, 3 to 4 feet high, simple, or putting out only a few lateral branches. The leaves, shortly petioled, are roundish, ovate-cordate, 2 to 3 inches long, and about 1 1/4 inch broad, entire or three to five lobed, irregularly toothed at the margin, and thick. They are soft and velvety on both sides, due to a dense covering of stellate hairs. The flowers are shaped like those of the common Mallow, but are smaller and of a pale colour, and are either axillary, or in panicles, more often the latter.

The stamens are united into a tube, the anthers, kidney-shaped and one-celled. The flowers are in bloom during August and September, and are followed, as in other species of this order, by the flat, round fruit called popularly 'cheeses.'

The common Mallow is frequently called by country people, 'Marsh Mallow,' but the true Marsh Mallow is distinguished from all the other Mallows growing in Britain, by the numerous divisions of the outer calyx (six to nine cleft), by the hoary down which thickly clothes the stems, and foliage, and by the numerous panicles of blush-coloured flowers, paler than the Common Mallow.

The roots are perennial, thick, long and tapering, very tough and pliant, whitishyellow outside, white and fibrous within.

The whole plant, particularly the root, abounds with a mild mucilage, which is emollient to a much greater degree than the common Mallow. The generic name, *Althaea*, is derived from the Greek, *altho* (to cure), from its healing properties. The name of the order, Malvaceae, is derived from the Greek, *malake* (soft), from the special qualities of the Mallows in softening and healing.

Most of the Mallows have been used as food, and are mentioned by early classic writers in this connexion. Mallow was an esculent vegetable among the Romans, a dish of Marsh Mallow was one of their delicacies.

The Chinese use some sort of Mallow in their food, and Prosper Alpinus stated (in 1592) that a plant of the Mallow kind was eaten by the Egyptians. Many of the poorer inhabitants of Syria, especially the Fellahs, Greeks and Armenians, subsist for weeks on herbs, of which Marsh Mallow is one of the most common. When boiled first and fried with onions and butter, the roots are said to form a palatable dish, and in times of scarcity consequent upon the failure of the crops, this plant, which fortunately grows there in great abundance, is much collected for food.

In Job XXX. 4 we read of Mallow being eaten in time of famine, but it is doubtful whether this was really a true mallow. Canon Tristram thinks it was some saline plant; perhaps the *Orache*, or Sea-Purslane.

Horace and Martial mention the laxative properties of the Marsh Mallow leaves and root, and Virgil tells us of the fondness of goats for the foliage of the Mallow.

Dioscorides extols it as a remedy, and in ancient days it was not only valued as a medicine, but was used, especially the Musk Mallow, to decorate the graves of friends.

Pliny said: 'Whosoever shall take a spoonful of the Mallows shall that day be free from all diseases that may come to him.' All Mallows contain abundant mucilage, and the Arab physicians in early times used the leaves as a poultice to suppress inflammation.

Preparations of Marsh Mallow, on account of their soothing qualities, are still much used by country people for inflammation, outwardly and inwardly, and are used for lozenge-making. French druggists and English sweetmeat-makers prepare a confectionary paste (*Pâét, de Guimauve*) from the roots of Marsh Mallow, which is emollient and soothing to a sore chest, and valuable in coughs and hoarseness. The 'Marsh Mallows' usually sold by confectioners here are a mixture of flour, gum, egg-albumin, etc., and contain no mallow.

In France, the young tops and tender leaves of Marsh Mallow are eaten uncooked, in spring salads, for their property in stimulating the kidneys, a syrup being made from the roots for the same purpose.

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---Cultivation---Marsh Mallow used always to be cultivated in gardens on account of its medicinal qualities. It is said to have been introduced by the Romans.

It can be raised from seed, sown in spring, but cuttings will do well, and offsets of the root, carefully divided in autumn, when the stalks decay, are satisfactory, and will grow of their own accord.

Plant about 2 feet apart. It will thrive in any soil or situation, but grows larger in moist than in dry land, and could well be cultivated on unused ground in damp localities near ditches or streams.

---Parts Used---Leaves, root and flowers. The leaves are picked in August, when the flowers are just coming into bloom. They should be stripped off singly and gathered only on a fine day, in the morning, after the dew has been dried off by the sun.

---Constituents---Marsh Mallow contains starch, mucilage, pectin, oil, sugar, asparagin, phosphate of lime, glutinous matter and cellulose.

---Medicinal Action and Uses---The great demulcent and emollient properties of Marsh Mallow make it useful in inflammation and irritation of the alimentary canal, and of the urinary and respiratory organs. The dry roots boiled in water give out half their weight of a gummy matter like starch. Decoctions of the plant, especially of the root, are very useful where the natural mucus has been abraded from the coats of the intestines, The decoction can be made by adding 5 pints of water to 1/4 lb.

of dried root, boiling down to 3 pints and straining: it should not be made too thick and viscid. It is excellent in painful complaints of the urinary organs, exerting a relaxing effect upon the passages, as well as acting curatively. This decoction is also effective in curing bruises, sprains or any ache in the muscles or sinews. In haemorrhage from the urinary organs and in dysentery, it has been recommended to use the powdered root boiled in milk. The action of Marsh Mallow root upon the bowels is unaccompanied by any astringency.

Boiled in wine or milk, Marsh Mallow will relieve diseases of the chest, constituting a popular remedy for coughs, bronchitis, whooping-cough, etc., generally in combination with other remedies. It is frequently given in the form of a syrup, which is best adapted to infants and children.

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RECIPES

Marsh Mallow Water

'Soak one ounce of marsh mallow roots in a little cold water for half an hour; peel off the bark, or skin; cut up the roots into small shavings, and put them into a jug to stand for a couple of hours; the decoction must be drunk tepid, and may be sweetened with honey or sugar-candy, and flavoured with orange-flower water, or with orange juice. Marshmallow water may be used with good effect in all cases of inveterate coughs, catarrhs, etc.' (Francatelli's *Cook's Guide*.)

For Gravel, etc.

'Put the flower and plant (all but the root) of Marsh Mallows in a jug, pour boiling water, cover with a cloth, let it stand three hours - make it strong. If used for gravel or irritation of the kidney, take 1/2 pint as a Tea daily for four days, then stop a few days, then go on again. A teaspoonful of gin may be added *when there is no tendency to inflammation*.' (From a family recipe-book.)

The powdered or crushed fresh roots make a good poultice that will remove the most obstinate inflammation and prevent mortification. Its efficacy in this direction has earned for it the name of Mortification Root. Slippery Elm may be added with advantage, and the poultice should be applied to the part as hot as can be borne and renewed when dry. An infusion of 1 OZ. of leaves to a pint of boiling water is also taken frequently in wineglassful doses. This infusion is good for bathing inflamed eyes.

An ointment made from Marsh Mallow has also a popular reputation, but it is stated that a poultice made of the fresh root, with the addition of a little white bread, proves more serviceable when applied externally than the ointment. The fresh leaves, steeped in hot water and applied to the affected parts as poultices, also reduce inflammation, and bruised and rubbed upon any place stung by wasps or bees take away the pain, inflammation and swelling. Pliny stated that the green leaves, beaten with nitre and applied, drew out thorns and prickles in the flesh.

The flowers, boiled in oil and water, with a little honey and alum, have proved good as a gargle for sore throats. In France, they form one of the ingredients of the *Tisane de quatre fleurs*, a pleasant remedy for colds.

---Preparations and Dosage---Fluid extract leaves. 1/2 to 2 drachms.