

# Meadowsweet Herb, Flowers and Powder Profile

## Also known as

Filipendula ulmaria, Dropwort, Bridewort, Queen of the Meadow, Trumpet weed, Rios Cuchulainn, Meadow wort, Drop wort, Pride of the Meadow.

## Introduction

Sometimes referred to nature's aspirin, meadowsweet is one of the most common herbs, growing wild throughout Europe and Asia, and naturalized to grow throughout North America's Eastern coast. It was one of the three sacred herbs renowned by Druids, along with vervain and water-mint. Its historical medicinal uses are confirmed enough that it is licensed as a standard medicinal tea in Germany by the German E Commission, which wrote that it is used as a supportive ingredient for fever and common colds, and appears as an ingredient in herbal preparations for treating influenza, rheumatism and kidney and bladder complaints. Nicholas Culpepper wrote in 1652 that meadowsweet "helps in the speedy recovery from cholic disorders and removes the instability and constant change in the stomach."

## Constituents

salicin, polyphenolic tannins, especially rugosin-D; 0.5-1.0% flavonoids, quercetin and kaempferol derivatives; phenolic glycosides, mostly spiraein and monotropitin, the primeverosides of salicylaldehyde and methyl salicylate, also isosalicin, a glucoside of salicyl alcohol; volatile oil, mainly; mucilage; and ascorbic acid

## Parts Used

Leaves and aerial parts for medicine, and usually the flowers for flavoring

## Typical Preparations

In tea infusions, as a capsule or extract and sometimes included in food. The flowers are used as a natural sweetener for teas, foods and other beverages.

## Summary

Meadowsweet has a long tradition of use in folk medicine as a treatment for coughs and colds. Its astringent and demulcent properties have been borne out by research, and the German government recognizes meadowsweet tea as a treatment for colds and coughs. Meadowsweet contains salicylic acid, the main constituent in aspirin, and has its analgesic and fever-reducing properties. Meadowsweet is also traditionally used to relieve pain associated with rheumatism, menstrual cramps, headache, arthritis and low grad fever. It also seems to be effective against bacteria that causes diarrhea and may inhibit blood clotting.

## Precautions

Since meadowsweet contains small amounts of salicylate, it should not be used by people with a sensitivity to aspirin or similar products. For the same reason, it should not be used by children under the age of sixteen with high fevers, particularly if the cause may be viral, because of the rare but very real risk of Reyes syndrome. It is not recommended for use by those taking blood thinning medications.

**Botanical: Spiraea Ulmaria (LINN.)**

**Family: N.O. Rosaceae**

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---**Synonyms**---Meadsweet. Dolloff. Queen of the Meadow. Bridewort. Lady of the Meadow.

---**Part Used**---Herb.

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---**Description**---The fragrant Meadowsweet is one of the best known wild flowers, decking our meadows and moist banks with its fernlike foliage and tufts of delicate, graceful, creamy-white flowers, which are in blossom from June to almost September. The leaves are dark green on the upper side and whitish and downy underneath, much divided, being interruptedly pinnate, having a few large serrate leaflets and small intermediate ones; the terminal leaflets are large, 1 to 3 inches long and three to five lobed. The stems are 2 to 4 feet high, erect and furrowed, sometimes purple. The flowers are small, clustered close together in handsome irregularly-branched cymes, and have a very strong, sweet smell. The whole herb possesses a pleasant taste and flavour, the green parts partaking of the aromatic character of the flowers.

A peculiarity of this flower is that the scent of the leaves is quite different from that of the flowers. The latter possess an almondlike fragrance, it is one of the fragrant herbs used to strew the floors of chambers. In allusion to this use, Gerard writes:

'The leaves and floures of Meadowsweet farre excelle all other strowing herbs for to decke up houses, to strawe in chambers, halls and banqueting-houses in the summer-time, for the smell thereof makes the heart merrie and joyful and delighteth the senses.'

Meadowsweet, water-mint, and vervain were three herbs held most sacred by the Druids.

It is one of the fifty ingredients in a drink called 'Save,' mentioned in *Chaucer's Knight's Tale*, in the fourteenth century being called Medwort, or Meadwort, i.e. the mead or honey-wine herb, and the flowers were often put into wine and beer. It is still incorporated in many herb beers.

The name *Ulmaria* is given in allusion to the resemblance of its leaves to those of the Elm (*Ulmus*), being much wrinkled on the upper side.

Gerard says:

'It is reported that the floures boiled in wine and drunke do take away the fits of a quartaine ague and make the heart merrie. The distilled water of the floures dropped into the eies taketh away the burning and itching thereof and cleareth the sight.'

Culpepper says much the same and also:

'The leaves, when they are full grown, being laid on the skin will, in a short time, raise blisters thereon, as Tragus saith.' He also states that for acquiring the 'merry heart' (which Gerard mentions) 'some use the flowers and some the leaves.' He tells us that 'a leave hereof put into a cup of claret wine gives also a fine relish to it.'

**---Medicinal Action and Uses---**Aromatic, astringent, diuretic, and sub-tonic. It is a valuable medicine in diarrhoea, imparting to the bowels some degree of nourishment, as well as of astringency. It is also considered of some service as a corrector of the stomach, and not without some power as an alterative, and is frequently used in affections of the blood. It is a good remedy in strangury, dropsy, etc., and almost a specific in children's diarrhoea.

An infusion of 1 OZ. of the dried herb to a pint of water is the usual mode of administration, in wineglassful doses. Sweetened with honey, it forms a very pleasant diet-drink, or beverage both for invalids and ordinary use.

The herb is collected in July, when in flower.

An infusion of the fresh tops produces perspiration, and a decoction of the root, in white wine, was formerly considered a specific in fevers.

Meadowsweet is visited by bees for the pollen.

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**---Dosage---**Fluid extract, 1/2 to 1 drachm.

**---Other Species---**

Another member of the *Spiraea* is *Spircea Filipendula* (Dropwort). A herb about a foot high, with short rhizome and nodulose rootlets; leaves interruptedly pinnate, leaflets cut into narrow serrated segments; flowers in crowded, erect, compound cymes, pink externally in bud; when open, white and scentless. Dry pastures on a limestone (or chalky) soil. Distinguished from *S. Ulmaria* by its elegantly cut foliage, pink buds, and whiter scentless blossoms. A double-flowered variety is common in gardens. Flowering time - June, July. Perennial.

Culpepper speaks of *Filipendula*, or Dropwort, as being a good remedy for kidneyaffections, by 'taking the roots in powder or a decoction of them in white wine, with a little honey.' He adds that it:

'is also very effectual for all the diseases of the lungs, as shortness of breath, wheezing, hoarseness of the throat; and to expectorate tough phlegm, or any other parts thereabout.'

WILLOW-LEAVED SPIRÆA (*S. saliciflora*), a shrub with simple ex-stipulate leaves and spike-like clusters of rose-coloured flowers, grows in moist woods in the north and in Wales; but it is not indigenous. It flowers in July and August. Perennial.



**Willowleaf Meadowsweet**  
(*Spiraea salicifolia*)

[Click on graphic for larger image](#)

There are several foreign species of *Spiraea*, one from Japan being a beautiful shrub with pure white flowers, and leaves like those of the plum, hence its name, *S. prunifolia*.

There is another from Nepal, *S. bella*, with rose-coloured flowers growing in lateral and terminal corymbs; another from Canada, *S. tomentosa*, with cottony leaves and pyramidal panicles of rose-coloured flowers; and *S. Fortunei* from China, with ovate, smooth, toothed leaves often tinged with purple, and rose-coloured flowers.