

Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*)

Common Names: Creeping thyme, French thyme, garden thyme, mountain thyme.

Location: Mediterranean climates.

Description: Thyme is an aromatic garden herb in the mint family. Growing to a height of fifteen inches, it bears small leaves and pink flowers on woody stems. This herb is not the same plant species as wild thyme or mother of thyme. Thyme's common name was probably derived from the Greek word *thymus*, or courage. In medieval times, knights supposedly wore sprigs of thyme as a symbol of courage. Thyme was also used to preserve meat.

Properties: Thyme is available as an essential oil, both as a liquid and in enteric-coated capsules.

Uses: Thyme is a strong antiseptic. It is used externally for infected wounds and internally for respiratory and digestive infections. Oil of thyme (thymol) is used in commercial mouthwashes (it is the main ingredient in Listerine) and toothpastes. It also helps reduce headaches. Thyme baths are helpful for neurasthenia, rheumatic problems, bruises, swellings, and sprains. Aromatherapists consider the essential oil a powerful mood-enhancing herb for low spirits, fatigue, mental stress, and premenstrual tension. Benefits of thyme for specific health conditions include treatment of the following: allergies, respiratory, asthma, cough, athlete's foot and yeast infection.

Doses: Thyme oil should be used topically only. Fresh or dried thyme can be eaten in cooking.

Warnings: European authorities caution that thyme can cause abdominal contractions. Using thyme oil in bath preparations has, in rare cases, caused severe inflammation and hyperemia (an unusual flood of blood to a particular part of the body). Added to toothpastes, it can cause cracks in the corners of the mouth and a swollen tongue. You should not use thyme if you have a duodenal ulcer or you are pregnant. Taken internally, it can cause vomiting and dizziness, convulsions, coma, and cardiac and respiratory arrest. If you have any kind of thyroid condition, you should talk to a healthcare professional before taking medicinal doses of thyme. Studies indicate that the herb suppresses normal thyroid activity.