

Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)

Common Names: Bloodwort, milfoil, soldier's woundwort.

Location: Traditional herbalists in Europe, China, and India have used yarrow to stop minor bleeding and to treat wounds and inflammation.

Description: Yarrow is a creeping perennial plant. Growing three feet tall, it has white or, occasionally, rose-colored flower heads with yellow centers. Its species name *millefolium* refers to its "thousand leaves." Finely divided, crowded leaves grow on alternate sides of its erect central stems.

Properties: The leaves, stems, and flowers are used medicinally.

Uses: Yarrow appears to have been used as a healing agent virtually since the dawn of the human race. Excavation of a 40,000 to 60,000-year-old Neanderthal grave yielded yarrow (as well as the herbs *althea*, *centaurea*, *ephedra*, and *senecio*). Yarrow's scientific name, *Achillea*, refers to the Greek legend of its use in ointments in the Trojan War. According to legend, Achilles used yarrow to stop bleeding in his soldiers. It has also been used to stop minor bleeding and to treat wounds and inflammation, especially in the intestinal and female reproductive tracts. It has also traditionally been used as a mild sedative. Yarrow is an anti-inflammatory herb useful in the treatment of diarrhea, flatulence, gastrointestinal inflammation, and stomach cramps. This herb can reduce smooth-muscle spasms, which makes it useful for certain gastrointestinal conditions. Yarrow is also a traditional stomach tonic and digestive aid. Yarrow tea has long been used to induce sweating and lower fever. This herb has mild sedative properties that may prevent insomnia. Herbalists prescribe yarrow to relieve cramps and other menstrual pain. Benefits of yarrow for specific health conditions include treatment of the following: blurred vision, bruises and pain, common cold and influenza.

Doses: Yarrow is used in teas (which can be made into poultices) and aromatherapy oils. The herb is most easily purchased in bulk from herb shops. Topical application and or long-term use can cause skin irritation and or allergic reactions. If this occurs, stop using the herb. Yarrow may also increase the skin's sensitivity to sunlight.

Warnings: If you are using the herb to treat any type of wound, be sure to clean the affected area carefully before applying yarrow because this herb can stop blood flow so quickly that it may seal in dirt or other contaminants. Yarrow should not be used to treat large, deep, or infected wounds. This type of injury requires medical attention. Yarrow is a uterine stimulant. Although miscarriage is not likely from use of therapeutic doses, the herb nevertheless should not be used internally during pregnancy except under the direction of a qualified herbalist or midwife. Women who experience heavy periods or who have pelvic inflammatory disease also should avoid use of yarrow. Yarrow is also a biliary stimulant, increasing the production of bile. This action may intensify the pain of gallstones. If you have gallstones, this herb certainly should be avoided during an acute attack. Alcohol extracts of yarrow stop sperm production in laboratory mice. Men seeking to become fathers should avoid this herb. Yarrow is an unusual plant in that it adapts itself to new surroundings easily, and its chemical composition changes readily in response to changes in the environment. For this reason, it is important to use yarrow from the same source every time to get reliable results.