

Reference Guide for HERBS

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Medicinal plants and their properties

Foreword

The vegetable world comprises three main groups of plants: Superior, Intermediary and Inferior. These encompass bacteria, microscopic algae, mushrooms, ferns, brushes and trees, among others. Their identification is a task of specialists and the limit between the vegetal and animal world is not clear. To simplify matters, we consider plants those recognized as such by ordinary people. Books about medicinal properties of vegetables normally seem to treat differently herbs and medicinal plants. However, herbs are seed producing annual, biennial or perennial plants that do not develop a persistent woody tissue. Perhaps because herbs have such an important historical and tradition in healing, sometimes they are treated as a special category of plants i.e., those particularly valued for their medicinal, savory or aromatic qualities. In the following list, herbs are considered as medicinal plants and taken only for their medicinal or aromatic properties.

Since the traditional or popular name of medicinal plants varies so much according to regional and cultural aspects, they have been grouped alphabetically according to their most common English name. The scientific designation follows in each case.

Properties and uses

1) ALOE VERA

Aloe vera syn. *A. barbadensis* (Liliaceae)

HISTORY and USES

Native to Africa, *aloe vera* is commonly cultivated elsewhere. The clear gel found inside the plant's leaf and the crystalline part found alongside the leaf blade, which contains *aloin*, are both used for medicinal and cosmetic purposes. The clear gel is a

remarkably effective healer of wounds and burns, speeding up the rate of healing and reducing the risk of infection. The brownish part containing *aloin* is a strong laxative, useful for short-term constipation. Aloe is present in many cosmetic's formulae because its emollient and scar preventing properties.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Heals wounds, emollient, laxative.

2) ANGELICA

Angelica arcangelica (Umbelliferae)

HISTORY and USES

Angelica has a long-standing record as a prized medicinal herb and has been mentioned by European herbalist since the 15th Century. Angelica has been used to reduce muscular spasms in asthma and bronchitis. It has also been shown to ease rheumatic inflammation, to regulate menstrual flow and as an appetite stimulant. The stems are candied for culinary use.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Antispasmodic, promotes menstrual flow.

3) ANISE

Pimpinella anisum (Umbelliferae)

HISTORY and USES

Anise has been cultivated in Egypt and known to the Greeks, Romans and Arabs, who named the plant *anysun*. Since Antiquity it has been used as a flavoring spice in recipes and as a diuretic, to treat digestive problems and to relieve toothache. Anise seeds are known for their ability to reduce flatulence and colic, and to settle the digestion. They are commonly given to infants and children to relieve colic, and to people of all ages to ease nausea and indigestion. It also has an expectorant and antispasmodics action that is helpful in countering period pain, asthma, whooping cough and bronchitis. The mild hormonal action of anise seeds may explain its ability to increase breast-milk production and its reputation for easing childbirth and treating impotence and frigidity. Anise essential oil is used externally to treat lice and scabies.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Reduces colic and flatulence, promotes digestion, antispasmodic

4) ARNICA

Arnica montana (Compositae)

HISTORY and USES

Arnica has been used extensively in European folk medicine. The German philosopher and poet Goethe (1749-1832), claimed arnica for ease his angina in old age. Herbalism and homeopathy use arnica extracts, ointments and compresses to reduce inflammation and pain from bruises, sprains, tendons, dislocations and swollen areas. Arnica improves the local blood supply and accelerates healing. It is anti-inflammatory and increases the rate of re-absorption of internal bleeding. The internal use of arnica is restricted to homeopathic dosages as it is potentially toxic.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Anti-inflammatory, germicide, muscular soreness, pain relieving.

5) ARROWROOT

Maranta arundinacea (Marantaceae)

HISTORY and USES

Arrowroot is native to South America and the Caribbean. The local indigenous people use its root as a poultice for smallpox sores, and as an infusion for urinary infections. Arrowroot is used in herbal medicine in much the same manner as slippery elm (*Ulmus Rubra*), as a soothing demulcent and a nutrient of benefit in convalescence and for easing digestion. It helps to relieve acidity, indigestion and colic, and is mildly laxative. It may be applied as an ointment or poultice mixed with some other antiseptic herbs such as comfrey.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Anti-inflammatory, digestive, antiseptic.

6) ARTEMISIA, WORMWOOD

Artemisia absinthium (Compositae)

HISTORY and USES

The name of this plant derives from its bitterness, from *absinthia*, the Roman word for "bitter". This property is used for providing bitter taste to some well known beverages and liquors.

Wormwood has a marked tonic effect on the stomach, the gallbladder and in adjusting weak digestive problems. It is used to expel roundworms and threadworms. By improving the functions of the digestive system it helps in many conditions, including

anaemia. It is also a muscle relaxer occasionally used to treat rheumatism. The leaves of wormwood have antiseptic properties which may derive from the azulenes that the plant contains.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Bitter, carminative, muscle relaxer, antiseptic.

7) BASIL, HOLY BASIL

Ocimum sanctum (Labiatae)

HISTORY and USES

Holy basil, like sweet (culinary) basil, comes from India where it is revered as a sacred herb. The Egyptians burned a mixture of basil and myrrh to appease their gods. Sweet Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*) was introduced in Europe as a seasoning for food. The herb has very important medicinal properties - notably its ability to reduce blood sugar levels. It also prevents peptic ulcers and other stress related conditions like hypertension, colitis and asthma. Basil is also used to treat cold and reduce fever, congestion and joint pain. Due to its anti-bacterial and fungicide action, basil leaves are used on itching skin, insect biting and skin affections.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Lowers blood sugar levels, antispasmodic, analgesic, lowers blood pressure, reduces fever, fungicidal, anti-inflammatory.

8) BELLADONA, DEADLY NIGHTSHADE

Atropa belladonna (Solanaceae)

HISTORY and USES

Deadly nightshade is native to Europe, western Asia and northern Africa. *Herba bella dona*, or "herb of the beautiful lady" is known for its poisonous effects (belladonna increases heartbeat and can lead to death), like many other plants it is an important and beneficial remedy when used correctly. Belladonna contains *atropine* used in conventional medicine to dilate the pupils for eye examinations and as an anesthetic. In herbal medicine, deadly nightshade is mainly prescribed to relieve intestinal colic, to treat peptic ulcers and to relax distended organs, especially the stomach and intestine. Deadly nightshade is also used as an anaesthetic in conventional medicine.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Smooth muscle, antispasmodic, narcotic, reduces sweating, sedative.

9) BENZOIN GUM

Styrax benzoin (Styraceae)

HISTORY and USES

Benzoin is a tree native to South-East Asia. Its trunk exudes a gum well known for its strong astringent and antiseptic action. For this reason it is used externally to fight tissue inflammation and disinfection of wounds. When taken internally, benzoin gum acts to settle griping pain, to stimulate coughing, and to disinfect the urinary tract. Benzoin gum is widely used in cosmetics as an antioxidant in oils, as a fixative in perfumes and as an additive to soaps. When steam inhaled, it helps healing sore throats, head and chest colds, asthma and bronchitis.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Antiseptic, astringent, anti-inflammatory.

10) BERGAMOT

Citrus bergamia syn. *C. aurantium* var. *bergamia* (Rutaceae)

HISTORY and USES

Bergamot oil, expressed from the peel, assists in avoiding infectious diseases. In cosmetics it is used in preventing oily skin, acne, psoriasis and acne. The oil (or constituents of it) are sometimes added to sun-tanning oils. Bergamot oil is also used to relieve tension, relax muscle spasms and improve digestion.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Disinfectant, muscle relaxant.

11) BITTER ORANGE

Citrus aurantium (Rutaceae)

HISTORY and USES

The bitter orange, native to tropical Asia, has provided food and medicine for thousands of years. Its oil contains *flavonoids* which are anti-inflammatory, antibacterial and antifungal. Bitter orange juice is rich in vitamin C which helps the immune system. As an infusion, it helps to relieve fever, soothe headaches and lower fever. It yields *neroli* oil from its flowers, and the oil known as *petitgrain* from its leaves and young shoots. Both distillates are used extensively in perfumery. Orange flower water is a by-product of distillation and is used in perfumery and to flavor sweets and biscuits, as well as being used medicinally to reduce

heart rate and palpitations, to encourage sleep and calm the digestive tract.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Anti-inflammatory, antifungal, antibacterial, digestive.

12) BOLDO

Peumus boldus (Umbelliferae)

HISTORY and USES

Boldo is a tree original from the Chilean Andes. It activates the secretion of saliva and gastric juices. *Boldine*, one of its constituents, induces the flow of bile as well as the total amount of solids that it excretes. Its protective action over the hepatic cells has been demonstrated "in vitro" and "in vivo". Boldo stimulates liver activity and bile flow and is chiefly valued as a remedy for gallstones and liver or gallbladder pain. It is normally taken for a few weeks at a time, either as a tincture or infusion. Boldo also has antiseptic properties which help in combating cystitis.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Bile and liver activity stimulant, digestive.

13) CALENDULA, MARIGOLD

Calendula officinallis (Compositae)

HISTORY and USES

Marigold is one of the best herbs for treating local skin problems. Infusions or decoctions of Calendula petals decrease the inflammation of sprains, stings, varicose veins and other swellings and also soothes burns, sunburns, rashes and skin irritations. These remedies are excellent for inflamed and bruised skin, their antiseptic and healing properties helping to prevent the spread of infection and accelerate the healing. Marigold is also a cleansing and detoxifying herb, and the infusion and tincture are used to treat chronic infections. Taken internally, it has been used traditionally to promote the draining of swollen lymph glands such as tonsillitis.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Anti-inflammatory, astringent, heals wounds, antiseptic, detoxifying.

14) CAMPHOR

Cinnamomum camphora syn. *Laurus camphora* (Lauraceae)

HISTORY and USES

Camphor trees are native to China and Japan and are cultivated for its wood for the extraction of camphor oil. Marco Polo was the first to note that the Chinese used camphor oil as a medicine, scent and embalming fluid. Camphor crystals have strong antiseptic, stimulant and antispasmodic properties and are applied externally as unguents or balms as a counter-irritant and analgesic liniment to relieve arthritic and rheumatic pains, neuralgia and back pain. It may also be applied to skin problems, such as cold sores and chilblains, and used as a chest rub for bronchitis and other chest infections.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Antiseptic, antispasmodic, analgesic, expectorant.

15) CARDAMOM

Elettaria cardamomum (Zingiberaceae)

HISTORY and USES

Cardamom has been praised as a spice and medicine and used in ancient Egypt to make perfumes. It is an excellent remedy for many digestive problems, helping to soothe indigestion, dyspepsia, gastralgia, colon spasms and flatulence. It has an aromatic and pungent taste and combines well with other herbs and helps to disguise the less pleasant taste of other herbs.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Eases stomach pain, carminative, aromatic, antispasmodic.

16) CARDUS, MILK THISTLE, MARY THISTLE

Carduus marianus syn. *Silybum marianum* (Compositae)

HISTORY and USES

Milk thistle is native to the Mediterranean and has been in use as a remedy for liver problems for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. It is used in a whole range of liver and bladder conditions including hepatitis and cirrhosis. Recent research has confirmed traditional herbal knowledge, proving that the herb has a remarkable ability to protect the liver from damage resulting from alcoholic and other types of poisoning. Today, milk thistle is widely used in the West for the treatment of a range of liver conditions.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Digestive, liver tonic, stimulates secretion of bile, increases breast-milk production, antidepressant.

17) CELERY, SMALLAGE

Apium graveolens (Umbelliferae)

HISTORY and USES

More familiar as a vegetable than as a medicine, celery find its main use in the treatment of rheumatism, arthritis and gout. Containing *apiol*, the seeds are also used as a urinary antiseptic. Celery is a good cleansing, diuretic herb, and the seeds are used specifically for arthritic complaints where there is an accumulation of waste products. The seeds also have a reputation as a carminative with a mild tranquilizing effect. The stems are less significant medicinally.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Anti-rheumatic, antispasmodic, diuretic, urinary antiseptic.

18) CHAMOMILE, GERMAN CHAMOMILE

Chamomilla recutita syn. *Matricaria recutita* (Compositae)

HISTORY and USES

Chamomile grows wild in Europe and west Asia. Related species are found in North America and Africa. Its flowers help to ease indigestion, nervousness, depressions and headaches, being ideal for emotion related problems such as peptic ulcers, colitis, spastic colon and nervous indigestion. Chamomile's essential oil have anti-inflammatory, anti-spasmodic and anti-microbial activity. It is an excellent herb for many digestive disorders and for nervous tension and irritability. Externally, it is used for sore skin and eczema. Roman chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*) is a close relation, used in a similar way.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Anti-inflammatory, antispasmodic, relaxant, carminative, bitter, nervine.

19) CHICORY

Cicorium intybus (Compositae)

HISTORY and USES

Chicory is native to Europe and have been cultivated through the ages. As a tea or extract, chicory root is a bitter digestive tonic that also increases bile flow and decrease inflammation. Its roasted root is commonly used as a coffee substitute. Chicory is an excellent mild bitter tonic for the liver and digestive tract. The root is therapeutically similar to dandelion root supporting the action of the stomach and liver and cleansing the urinary tract. Chicory is also taken for rheumatic conditions and gout, and as a mild laxative, one particularly appropriate for children. An infusion of the leaves and flowers also aids the digestion.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Digestive, liver tonic, anti-rheumatic, mild laxative.

20) CINNAMON

Cinnamomum verum syn. C. zeylanicum (Lauraceae)

HISTORY and USES

Cinnamon is native to Sri Lanka, growing in tropical forest and being extensively cultivated throughout the tropical regions of the world. Cinnamon has a long history of use in India and was first used medicinally in Egypt and parts of Europe from about 500 BC. The infusion or powder is used for stomach pains and cramps. Traditionally, the herb was taken for colds, flu and digestive problems, and it is still used in much the same way today.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Warming stimulant, carminative, antispasmodic, antiseptic, anti-viral.

21) CLOVE

Eugenia caryophyllata syn. Syzgium aromaticum (Myrtaceae)

HISTORY and USES

Clove trees are original from Indonesia. The dried flower buds, clove, are extensively used as spice. The buds, leaves and stems are used for the extractions of clove's oil. Both the oil and the flower buds have been valued as a herbal medicine for a long time. The oil contains *eugenol*, a strong anaesthetic and atiseptic substance. Cloves are also well known for their antispasmodic and stimulative properties.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Antiseptic, mind and body stimulant, analgesic, antibacterial, carminative.

22) COMFREY, KNITBONE

Symphytum officinale (Boraginaceae)

HISTORY and USES

Comfrey's name derives from the Latin *con firma*, i.e. "with strength", from the belief that it could heal broken bones. Comfrey leaves and roots contain *allantoin*, a cell multiplication agent that increases the healing of wounds. Today, it is still highly regarded for its healing properties. Externally it is used for rashes, wounds, inflammation and skin problems. Internally, comfrey has action over the digestive tract helping to cure ulcers and colitis. It is also used for a variety of respiratory problems.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Digestive problems, anti-inflammatory, wound healing, astringent.

23) CORIANDER

Coriandrum sativum (Umbelliferae)

HISTORY and USES

Coriander use as a medicinal plant has been reported since 1500 B.C. both as a spice and as a medicine. It has now spread well beyond its native Mediterranean and Caucasian regions. It aids digestion, reduce flatulence and improves appetite. It helps relieving spasms within the gut and counters the effects of nervous tension. Coriander is also chewed to sweeten the breath, especially after consumption of garlic (*Allium sativum*). It is applied externally as a lotion for rheumatic pain. Coriander essential oil is used in the manufacture of perfumes, cosmetics and dentifrices.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Digestive, antispasmodic, anti-rheumatic.

24) CYMBOPOGON, LEMON GRASS

Cymbopogon citratus (Gramineae)

HISTORY and USES

Native from Sri Lanka and South India, lemon grass is now widely cultivated in the tropical areas of America and Asia. Its oil is used as a culinary flavoring, a scent and medicine. Lemon grass is principally taken as a tea to remedy digestive problems diarrhea and stomach ache. It relaxes the muscles of the stomach and gut, relieves cramping pains and flatulence and is particularly

suitable for children. In the Caribbean, lemon grass is primarily regarded as a fever-reducing herb. It is applied externally as a poultice or as diluted essential oil to ease pain and arthritis.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Digestive, antispasmodic, analgesic.

25) DAMIANA

Turnera diffusa syn. *T. diffusa* var. *aphrodisiaca* (Turneraceae)

HISTORY and USES

Native from the Gulf of Mexico, damiana has an ancient reputation as an aphrodisiac and is an excellent remedy for the nervous system acting as a stimulant and tonic in cases of mild depression. Damiana has a strongly aromatic, slightly bitter taste. The leaves are used to flavor liqueurs and are taken in Mexico as a substitute for tea.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Nerve tonic, antidepressant, urinary antiseptic.

26) DANDELION

Taraxacum officinale (Compositae)

HISTORY and USES

Occurring naturally in Asia, Dandelion is now a common plant everywhere. Its medicinal virtues were probably introduced in Europe by the Arabs in the 10th Century. Both the Persians and the East Indians used it for liver complaints. Known principally as a weed, dandelion has an astonishing range of health benefits. The leaves, which can be eaten in salads, are a powerful diuretic. The roots act as a "blood purifier" that helps both kidneys and the liver to remove impurities from the blood. This effect seems to be due to its potassium content. It also acts like a mild laxative and improves appetite and digestion.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Diuretic, digestive, antibiotic, bitter.

27) DILL

Anethum graveolens syn. *Peucedanum graveolens* (Umbelliferae)

HISTORY and USES

An ancient Egyptian remedy in the Ebers papyrus (c. 1500 BC)

recommends dill as one of the ingredients in a pain-killing mixture. The Romans knew dill as anethum, which latter became "anise". Dill has always been considered a remedy for the stomach, relieving wind and calming the digestion. Dill's essential oil relieves intestinal spasms and griping and helps to settle colic, hence it is often used in gripe water mixtures. Chewing the seeds improves bad breath. Dill makes a useful addition to cough, cold and flu remedies, and is a mild diuretic. Dill increases milk production, and when taken regularly by nursing mothers, helps to prevent colic in their babies.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Digestive, antibacterial, antispasmodic, diuretic.

28) EUCALYPTUS, BLUE GUM

Eucalyptus globulus (Myrtaceae)

HISTORY and USES

Eucalyptus is native from Australia, where it comprises more than 75% of all trees. A traditional aboriginal remedy, eucalyptus is a powerful antiseptic used all over the world for relieving coughs and colds, sore throats and other infections. The leaves cool the body and relive fever. Inhaling the vapors of the essential oils heated in water, clears sinus and bronchial congestions.

Eucaliptol, one of the substances found in the essential oil, is one of the main constituents of the many existing commercial formulas of chest rubs for colds. The essential oil has also strong anti-biotic, anti-viral and anti-fungal action. Eucalyptus is a common ingredient in many over-the-counter cold remedies.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Antiseptic, expectorant, stimulates local blood flow, anti-fungal.

29) FENNEL

Foeniculum vulgare (Umbelliferae)

HISTORY and USES

Native to the Mediterranean, fennel has spread to surrounding areas, including India. Known to the Greeks and Romans, it was used as food, spice and medicine. The primary use of fennel seeds is to relieve flatulence, but they also settle colic, stimulate the appetite and digestion. Fennel is also diuretic and anti-inflammatory. Like anise (*Pimpinella anisum*) and caraway (*Carum carvi*), it has a calming effect on bronchitis and coughs.

An infusion of the seeds may be taken as a gargle for sore throats and as a mild expectorant. Fennel increases breast-milk production and the herb is still used as an eye wash for sore eyes and conjunctivitis. Essential oil from the sweet variety is used for its digestive and relaxing properties.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Digestive, antispasmodic, anti-inflammatory.

30) GARLIC

Allium sativum (Liliaceae)

HISTORY AND USES

Original from Central Asia, garlic is now cultivated worldwide. It was widely known by the ancients, being found in Egyptian tombs and used by Greeks and Romans. Recognized for its pungent odor and taste, garlic is a powerful home medicine for the treatment for a host of health problems. It is one of the most effective anti-biotic plants available, acting on bacteria, viruses and alimentary parasites. It counters many infections, including those of the nose, throat and chest. Garlic is also known to reduce cholesterol, helps circulatory disorders, such as high blood pressure, and lower blood sugar levels, making it useful in cases of late-onset diabetes.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Antibiotic, expectorant, diaphoretic, hypotensive, antispasmodic, expels worms.

31) GENTIAN

Gentiana lutea (Gentianaceae)

HISTORY and USES

Native to Europe and Asia Minor, gentian properties as a medicinal plant go back to 180 B.C. Gentian is a powerful bitter that stimulates appetite and promotes digestion through the increased production of saliva, gastric juices and bile. It also decreases gastric inflammation and kill worms. Gentian is also used to treat liver and spleen problems and to promote menstruation. Medicinally, gentian strengthens a weak or under-active digestive system.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Bitter, digestive stimulant, eases stomach pain.

32) GINGER

Zingiber officinali (Zingiberaceae)

HISTORY and USES

Ginger is original from Southeast Asia and is now cultivated in most tropical countries. Its citations in ancient texts go back to the 4th century B.C. The Greeks imported it from the East centuries before Discorides recorded its use in the 1st century A.D. Familiar as a spice and flavoring, ginger is also one of the world's best medicines. The Chinese consider ginger as an important drug to treat cold and encourage sweating. Ginger brings relief to digestion, stimulates circulation, reduce headaches and kill intestinal parasites.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Diaphoretic, carminative, circulatory stimulant, inhibits coughing, anti-inflammatory, antiseptic.

33) GINKGO

Ginkgo biloba (Ginkgoaceae)

HISTORY and USES

Ginkgo is thought to be the oldest tree on the planet, first growing about 190 million years ago. It is probably native to China, although there are no wild trees remaining. Though long used as a medicine in its native China, its therapeutic actions have only recently been researched. Traditionally known as an anti-microbial and anti-tubercular action, it has now been shown that ginkgo as a profound activity on brain function and cerebral circulation. This action is useful to prevent dizziness, tinnitus, short-term memory loss, depression and other symptoms related to poor brain circulation. Its effect on poor circulation also used to treat other related disorders like diabetes, hemorrhoids and varicose veins. Ginkgo is also valuable for asthma.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Circulatory stimulant and tonic, anti-asthmatic, antispasmodic, anti-allergenic, anti-inflammatory.

34) GINSENG

Panax ginseng (Araliaceae)

HISTORY and USES

Ginseng is the most famous Chinese herb of all. It is native to north-eastern China, eastern Russia and Korea. The related species *Panax quinquefolious*, occurs in the eastern United States and Canada. Ginseng has ancient and rich history as a medicinal

plant and has been praised for its remarkable therapeutic benefits for about 7,000 years. Its value was so great that wars were fought for control of the forests in which it thrived. An Arabian physician brought ginseng back to Europe in the 9th century, yet its ability to improve stamina and resistance to stress became common knowledge in the West only from the 18th century. Ginseng increases mental and physical efficiency and resistance to stress and disease. It often shows a dual response like sedating or stimulating the central nervous system according to the condition it is being taken to treat. In the West, ginseng is regarded as a life-enhancing tonic.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Tonic, stimulant, physical and mental re vitalizer.

35) GUMPLANT

Grindelia camporum syn. *G. robusta* var. *rigida* (Compositae)

HISTORY AND USES

Gumplant is native to the south-western US and Mexico and was used by Native Americans to treat bronchial problems and also skin afflictions such as reactions to poison ivy. The plant's medicinal value was not recognized by traditional practitioners until the mid-19th century. Gumplant was officially recognized in the Pharmacopoeia of the United States from 1882 to 1926. Its anti-spasmodic, expectorant and hypotensive actions find applications in treating heart conditions, asthmatic and bronchial conditions. It has been employed in the treatment of whooping cough, hay fever and cystitis. Externally it relieves and heals skin irritations and burns.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Anti-spasmodic, expectorant, hypotensive.

36) HAMAMELIS, WITCH HAZEL

Hamamelis virginiana (Hamamelidaceae)

HISTORY AND USES

Witch hazel is native to eastern North America, from New England to west Minnesota. It was a traditional remedy of many native North American peoples. Witch hazel acts mostly on the veins and circulation. For this reason it has been used to decrease the inflammation and pain of bruises, sore muscles, bleeding, hemorrhoids, varicose veins, phlebitis, and insect bites. American Indians used poultices soaked in a decoction of bark to treat

tumors and inflammations, especially of the eye, and took the herb internally for hemorrhaging and heavy menstrual bleeding. Hammamelis was introduced in Europe on the 18th century.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Astringent, anti-inflammatory, stops external and internal bleeding.

37) HAWTHORN

Crataegus oxyacantha & C. monogyna (Rosaceae)

HISTORY AND USES

Hawthorn is native of Europe with close species found in North Africa and western Asia. The tree has been known and appreciated throughout the ages, by the ancient Greeks, Arabs and Europeans. Hawthorn is an extremely valuable medicinal herb. In the Middle Ages it was as a symbol of hope and taken for many ailments. It has been shown that its effects are only present when a whole plant preparation is used. Its applications are: the loss of cardiac function, feelings of congestions and oppression in the hearth region. Western herbalists consider it literally to be a "food for the heart", increasing blood flow to the heart muscles and restoring normal heart beat. Recent research has confirmed the validity of these uses.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Cardiotonic, diuretic, astringent, dilates blood vessels, relaxant, antioxidant.

38) HYSSOP

Hyssopus officinalis (Labiatae)

HISTORY AND USES

Hyssop is found native in the Mediterranean region and is commercially cultivated in Europe, Russia and India. In the past, hyssop was so highly esteemed it was regarded as a virtual cure-all. Currently an undervalued medicinal herb, hyssop is potentially useful as it is both calming and tonic. It has a large spectrum of uses which are due to its anti-spasmodic action. It is used in coughs, bronchitis, tight-chestedness, respiratory catarrh, sore throat and common cold. As a sedative, hyssop is a useful remedy against asthma in both children and adults, especially where the condition is exacerbated by mucus congestion. Hyssop is used to flavor various liqueurs, including Chartreuse.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Anti-spasmodic, expectorant, diaphoretic,

anti-inflammatory, hepatic.

39) JASMINE

Jasminum grandiflorum (Oleaceae)

HISTORY AND USES

Jasmine is probably native of Iran and is now well known and cultivated in Asia and Europe where it was in the 16th century, mainly as a source of perfume. Although it is rarely used today in the western World, flower syrups were used for coughs and leaf tea to rinse sore eyes and wounds. Jasmine flowers make a calming and sedative infusion, taken to relieve tension. The oil is considered antidepressant and relaxing. It is used externally to soothe dry and sensitive skin.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Aromatic, anti-spasmodic, expectorant.

40) JUNIPER

Juniperus communis (Cupressaceae)

HISTORY AND USES

Juniper is found in Europe, south-western Asia and North America. Juniper is tonic, diuretic and strongly antiseptic within the urinary tract. It is a valuable remedy for cystitis, and helps relieve fluid retention, but should be avoided in cases of kidney disease. In the digestive system, juniper is warming and settling, easing colic and supporting the function of the stomach. Taken internally or applied externally, juniper is helpful in the treatment of chronic arthritis, gout and rheumatic conditions. Applied externally as a diluted essential oil, it has a slightly warming effect on the skin and is thought to promote the removal of waste products from underlying tissues.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Diuretic, anti-microbial, carminative, anti-rheumatic.

41) LAUREL, BAY LAUREL

Laurus nobilis (Lauraceae)

HISTORY AND USES

Native to the Mediterranean region, bay laurel is now cultivated all over the world. Bay laurel was sacred to the gods Apollo and

Aesculapius, who together oversaw healing and medicine. The herb was thought to be greatly protective and healing. An infusion of the leaves was taken for its warming and tonic effect on the stomach and bladder, and a plaster made from the leaves was used to relieve wasp and bee stings. Bay laurel is used mainly to treat upper digestive tract disorders and to ease arthritic aches and pains. It is settling to the stomach and has a tonic effect, stimulating the appetite and the secretion of digestive juices.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Astringent, digestive.

42) LAVENDER

Lavandula officinalis syn. *L. angustifolia* (Labiatae)

HISTORY AND USES

Lavender is native to the Mediterranean region and is cultivated in France, Spain and elsewhere. It has been used for aromatic purposes by the Romans in washing water and baths. This herb has uses in culinary, cosmetics and medicine. It is effective to cure headaches, especially when related to stress, to clear depression associated with weakness and depression. Externally, lavender oil has been used as a stimulating liniment to help ease aches and pains of rheumatism.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Carminative, relieves muscle spasms, antidepressant, antiseptic and antibacterial, stimulates blood flow.

43) LEMON

Citrus Limon (Rutaceae)

A native from Asia, probably from India, it is now widely cultivated in Italy, California and Australia. Lemon was unknown to the ancient Greeks arriving in Europe probably brought by Roman soldiers returning from Asia Minor. It is one of the most important and versatile natural medicines for home use. A familiar food as well as a remedy, it has a high vitamin C content that helps improve resistance to infection, making it valuable for colds and flu. It is taken as a preventative for many conditions, including stomach infections, circulatory problems and arteriosclerosis. Lemon juice and oil are effective in killing germs. It decreases inflammation and improves digestion.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Antiseptic, anti-rheumatic, antibacterial, antioxidant, reduces fever.

44) MALVA, COMMON MALLOW

Malva silvestris (Malvaceae)

HISTORY AND USES

The young leaves and shoots of this plant have been eaten since at least the 8th century BC. The plant's many uses gave rise to the Spanish adage, "A kitchen garden and mallow, sufficient medicines for a home." The flowers and leaves are emollient and good for sensitive areas of the skin. It is applied as a poultice to reduce swelling and draw out toxins. Taken internally, the leaves reduce gut irritation and have a laxative effect. When common mallow is combined with eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus globulus*), it makes a good remedy for coughs and other chest ailments.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Anti-inflammatory, emollient, astringent, laxative.

45) MARJORAM, WILD MARJORAM

Origanum vulgare (Labiatae)

HISTORY AND USES

Native from Asia, marjoram cultivated commercially in several regions. Much used by the ancient Greeks, wild marjoram has had a more significant role in medicine than sweet marjoram (*O. majorana*). Marjoram tea is an age-old remedy to aid digestion, increase sweating and encourage menstruation. As a steam inhalant, marjoram clears the sinuses and helps relieve laryngitis. Wild marjoram helps settle flatulence and stimulates the flow of bile. Strongly antiseptic, it may be taken to treat respiratory conditions such as coughs, tonsillitis, bronchitis and asthma. The diluted oil can be applied to toothache or painful joints.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Antiseptic, anti-spasmodic, digestive.

46) MATE

Hex paraguariensis syn. *I. paraguensis* (Aquifoliaceae)

HISTORY AND USES

Native to South America, probably to Paraguay, mate is a traditional South American tea that increases short-term physical and mental energy levels. It is taken as a fortifying beverage in

much the same way as tea (*Camellia sinensis*) is consumed throughout Asia and Europe. Mate has properties similar to those of tea and coffee (*Coffea arabica*). It stimulates the nervous system, is mildly analgesic and diuretic. As a medicinal herb, mate is used to treat headaches, migraine, neuralgic and rheumatic pain, fatigue and mild depression. It has also been used in the treatment of diabetes.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Stimulant, diuretic, analgesic.

47) MELISSA, LEMON BALM

Melissa officinalis (Labiatae)

HISTORY AND USES

Lemon Balm has been cultivated in the Mediterranean region for more than 2,000 years. The Muslim herbalist Avicenna recommended lemon balm for heart problems. Its main action is as a tranquilizer. It calms nervous spasms, colics and hearth spasms. The hot tea promotes sweat that that is good for colds, flus and fevers. Its sedative actions have been used to help in the treatment of psychiatric problems, including dystonia. Lemon's balm anti-histamine action is useful to treat eczema and headaches. Today, this sweet-smelling herb is still widely valued for its calming properties, and new research shows that it can help significantly in the treatment of cold sores.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Relaxant, antispasmodic, increases sweating, carminative, anti-viral, nerve tonic.

48) MISTLETOE

Viscum album (Loranthaceae)

HISTORY AND USES

Native to Europe and northern Asian, mistletoe is chiefly used to lower blood pressure and hearth rate, ease anxiety and promote sleep. In low doses it also relieves panic attacks, headaches, and improves the ability to concentrate. Mistletoe is also prescribed for tinnitus and epilepsy. It may be used to treat hyperactivity in children. Mistletoe contain viscotoxins that inhibit tumors and stimulate the immune system. For this reason, research has been carried out on its potential use as a cancer treating plant .

MAIN PROPERTIES: Tranquilizer, reduces pain, controls blood pressure.

49) MOTHERWORT

Leonurus cardiaca (Labiatae)

HISTORY AND USES

Native to Europe, motherwort has been used as a medicinal plant in early Greece, where it was used to calm pregnant women suffering from anxiety. The other prominent use of the herb is due to its action over the heart by decreasing muscle spasms and lowering blood pressure. Other uses include the improvement of fertility, the relief of postpartum depression and menopause. Antispasmodic and sedative, the herb promotes relaxation rather than drowsiness. However, motherwort stimulates the muscles of the uterus, and is particularly suitable for delayed periods, period pain and premenstrual tension (especially if shock or distress is a factor).

MAIN PROPERTIES: Nervine, emmenagogue, anti-spasmodic, hepatic, hypotensive, cardiac tonic.

50) MYRRH

Commiphora molmol syn. *C. myrrha* (Burseraceae)

HISTORY AND USES

Native to north-east Africa, myrrh is mainly found in Ethiopia, Somalia, Saudi-Arabia, Iran and Thailand. Myrrh has been used in perfumes, incense and embalming. Its astringent, antimicrobial and antiseptic properties have been used to treat acne and boils as well as mild inflammatory conditions. It finds specific use in the treatment of infections in the mouth such as ulcers, gingivitis, pharyngitis, as well as catarrhal problems associated with pharyngitis and sinusitis.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Stimulant, antiseptic, anti-inflammatory, astringent, expectorant, antispasmodic, carminative

51) MYRTLE

Myrtus communis (Myrtaceae)

HISTORY AND USES

Myrtle is native to the Mediterranean region and is mainly cultivated for the extraction of its essential oil. Used in ancient Greece, the astringent, tonic and antiseptic properties of its leaves

are used to heal wounds, or internally to remedy disorders of the digestive and urinary systems. The essential oil is antiseptic and anti-catarrhal, and is used to treat chest ailments.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Antiseptic, astringent, expectorant.

52) NETTLE

Urtica dioica (Urticaceae)

HISTORY AND USES

Nettle occurs in Eurasia and is naturalized elsewhere, including America and is one of the most applicable plants found. Nettles have supplied fibers for cloth and paper since the Bronze Age into the 20th century. Throughout Europe, it has been used as a spring tonic and general detoxifying remedy. Nettle leaves contain iron and vitamin C, being used for treating anemia and poor circulation. Tea and poultice made from nettle leaves are used to treat eczema and skin conditions. Its astringent properties are used to stop bleeding. Today, nettle is used for hay fever, arthritis, anemia, and, surprisingly, even for nettle rash.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Diuretic, tonic, astringent, prevents hemorrhaging, anti-allergenic, reduces prostate enlargement (root).

53) OLIVE

Olea europaea (Oleaceae)

HISTORY AND USES

The olive was probably first cultivated in Crete in around 3500 BC. The leaves have been used since those times to clean wounds. Olive leaves lower blood pressure and help to improve the function of the circulatory system. They are also mildly diuretic and may be used to treat conditions such as cystitis. Possessing some ability to lower blood sugar levels, the leaves have been taken for diabetes. The oil is nourishing and improves the balance of fats within the blood. It is traditionally taken with lemon juice in teaspoonful doses to treat gallstones. The oil has a generally protective action on the digestive tract and is useful for dry skin. Externally, it is a good, although sticky, carrier oil for essential oils.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Digestive, diuretic, anti-inflammatory.

54) PALMETTO, SAW PALMETTO

Sabal serrulata syn. *Serenoa serrulata* (Palmaceae)

HISTORY AND USES

Saw palmetto berries were eaten by Native North Americans and animals. According to legend, on seeing the animals grow "sleek and fat", European settlers tried the berries and attributed medicinal properties to them. The fruit pulp was used as a tonic from the 19th century onwards, and today it is used to help in debility, for urinary tract problems and for reducing enlarged prostate glands.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Tonic, diuretic, sedative, anabolic.

55) PARSLEY

Petroselinum crispum (Umbelliferae)

HISTORY AND USES

Parsley is probably native from northern and central Europe and western Asia. It was known in ancient Greece and Rome - but more as a diuretic, digestive tonic and stimulant of the menstrual flow than as a salad herb. Parsley leaves, seed and root treat urinary tract infections and help eliminate kidney stones. It also stimulates appetite and increases blood flow to digestive organs, as well as reduces fevers. Parsley was introduced into Britain in 1548. Parsley has the unusual ability of masking strong odors, that of garlic in particular (which is one of reason for the herb's frequent use as a garnish in cookery). Parsley root is more commonly prescribed than the seeds or leaves in herbal medicine. It is taken as a treatment for flatulence, cystitis and rheumatic conditions. Parsley is also valued as a promoter of menstruation, being helpful both in stimulating a delayed period and in relieving menstrual pain.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Digestive, diuretic.

56) PASSIFLORA, PASSION FLOWER

Passiflora incarnata (Passifloraceae)

HISTORY AND USES

Passiflora is natural from the north America. Its name comes from its beautiful flowers, thought to represent Christ's

crucifixion - 5 stamens for the 5 wounds, 3 styles for the 3 nails and white and purple-blue colors for purity and heaven. The herb has valuable sedative and tranquilizing properties and has a long use as a medicine in Central and North American herbal traditions, being taken in Mexico for insomnia epilepsy and hysteria. The leaves are an ingredient in many pharmaceutical products to treat nervous disorders such as heart palpitations, anxiety, convulsions and sometimes high blood pressure. It is also used to prevent spasms from whooping cough, asthma and other diseases.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Anti-inflammatory, antispasmodic, hypotensive sedative, tranquilizing.

57) PATCHOULI

Pogostemon cablin syn. *P. patchouli* (Labiatae)

HISTORY AND USES

Native to Malaysia and the Philippines, Patchouli is now cultivated in tropical and sub-tropical regions around the world. Patchouli has been used extensively in Asian medicine, appearing in the Chinese, Indian and Arabic traditions. The oil is widely employed as a fragrance and, in India, as an insect repellent. Patchouli is used in herbal medicine in Asia as an aphrodisiac, antidepressant and antiseptic. It is also employed for headaches and fever. Patchouli essential oil is used in aromatherapy to treat skin complaints. It is thought to have a regenerative effect on skin tone and to help clear conditions such as eczema and acne. The oil may also be used for varicose veins and hemorrhoids.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Antiseptic, aromatic, antidepressant.

58) PEONIA, WHITE PEONY

Paeonia lactiflora syn. *P. albiflora* (Paeoniaceae)

HISTORY AND USES

Native to the southern Europe and the Mediterranean, peony is widely cultivated as a garden plant. Peony's history of medicinal use in China stretches back for at least 1,500 years. It is known most widely as one of the herbs used to make "Four Things Soup", a women's tonic, and it is also a remedy for gynecological problems and for cramp, pain and dizziness. Traditionally, it is considered that women who take the herb on a regular basis become as radiant as the flower itself.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Antispasmodic, tonic, astringent, analgesic. 6

59) PEPPERMINT

Mentha piperita (Labiatae)

HISTORY AND USES

Peppermint's origin is a mystery, but it has been in existence for a long time - dried leaves were found in Egyptian pyramids dating from around 1000 BC. It was highly valued by the Greeks and Romans, but only became popular in Western Europe in the 18th Century. Peppermint tea helps with indigestion and relaxes the muscles of the digestive tract. Peppermint's chief therapeutic value lies in its ability to relieve wind, flatulence, bloating and colic, though it has many other applications. Studies have shown that it relieves colon spasms and helps to cure ulcers. Peppermint also eases nervous headaches. Menthol, its main constituent, has antibacterial properties. Externally, the essential oil is used in balms and liniments to stimulate hot and cold nerve endings and increase local blood flow.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Carminative, relieves muscle spasms, increases sweating, stimulates secretion of bile, antiseptic.

60) PEPPER

Piper nigrum (Piperaceae)

HISTORY AND USES

Native to south-western India, pepper is now cultivated in tropical regions around the world. Praised as a spice and a medicine since ancient times, pepper was a vital commodity in world trade for thousands of years. Pepper has a stimulant and antiseptic effect on the digestive tract and the circulatory system. Pepper is commonly taken, either alone or in combination with other herbs and spices, to warm the body, or to improve digestive function in cases of nausea, stomach ache, flatulence, bloating, constipation or lack of appetite. The essential oil eases rheumatic pain and toothache. It is antiseptic and antibacterial, and reduces fever.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Antibacterial, antiseptic, digestive, reduces fever.

61) RADISH

Raphanus sativus (Cruciferae)

HISTORY AND USES

Radish probably is native from southern Asia. It has been used for medicinal purposes by the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans and Chinese.

Radish stimulates the appetite and the digestion. The juice of the black radish is drunk to counter gassy indigestion and constipation. Black radish juice has a tonic and laxative action on the intestines, and indirectly stimulates the flow of bile.

Consuming radish generally results in improved digestion, but some people are sensitive to its acidity and strong action. In China, radish is eaten to relieve abdominal distention.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Digestive, mild laxative.

62) RAUVOLFIA, INDIAN SNAKEROOT

Rauvolfia serpentina (Apocynaceae)

HISTORY AND USES

Rauvolfia is native to southern and south-eastern Asia, including India, Malaysia and Indonesia. Indian snakeroot contains reserpine, a substance now widely used to lower blood pressure and lessen some symptoms of mental illness. The root has a pronounced sedative and depressant effect on the sympathetic nervous system. By reducing the system's activity, the herb brings about the lowering of blood pressure. It may also be used to treat anxiety and insomnia, as well as more serious mental health problems such as psychosis.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Antidepressant, lowers blood pressure.

63) RHUBARB, CHINESE RHUBARB

Rheum palmatum (Polysonaceae)

HISTORY AND USES

Native to China and Tibet, chinese rhubarb is now grown also in the West. The use of chinese rhubarb has been reported in the 1st century AD in China and it has been cultivated in the West since the 18th century. Its main use is as a laxative safe even for young children due to its gentle action. It is also extremely effective in the treatment for many digestive problems. Paradoxically, it is a laxative when taken in large doses but has a constipating effect in

small measures. The rhizome has an astringent, unpleasant taste.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Laxative, constipating, astringent, eases stomach pain, antibacterial.

64) ROSE

Rosa gallica (Rosaceae)

HISTORY AND USES

The rose comes originally from Asia Minor, where it is cultivated mostly in Bulgaria, Iran and India. Rosewater was prepared by the Arab physician Avicenna (AD 980-1037) during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the rose was esteemed as a remedy for depression. The rose is currently little used in herbal medicine, but it is probably time for a re-evaluation of its medicinal benefits. The essential oil, called "attar of rose", is used in aromatherapy as a mildly sedative, antidepressant and anti-inflammatory remedy. Rose petals and their preparations have a similar action. They also reduce high cholesterol levels. Rosewater is mildly astringent and makes a valuable lotion for inflamed and sore eyes.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Aromatic, antidepressant,, sedative, anti-inflammatory.

65) ROSEMARY

Rosmarinus officinalis (Labiatae)

HISTORY AND USES

Rosemary is native to the Mediterranean region. Rosemary is a well-known and greatly valued herb that is native to southern Europe. It has been used since antiquity to improve and strengthen the memory. Rosemary leaves increase circulation, reduce headaches and have anti-bacterial and fungal properties. Rosemary improves food absorption by stimulating digestion, the liver, the intestinal tract, and the gallbladder. It also is used in antiseptic gargles for sore throats, gum problems and canker sores. Rosemary has a long-standing reputation as a tonic, invigorating herb, imparting a zest for life that is to some degree reflected in its distinctive aromatic taste.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Tonic, stimulant, astringent, nervine, anti-inflammatory, carminative.

66) RUE

Ruta graveolens (Rutaceae)

HISTORY AND USES

Rue is native to Southern Europe. In ancient Greece and Egypt, rue was employed to stimulate menstrual bleeding, to induce abortion and to strengthen the eyesight. The rutin contained in the plant helps to strengthen fragile blood vessels and alleviates varicose veins. Rue is also used due to its antispasmodic properties, especially in the digestive system where it eases griping and bowel tension. The easing of spasms gives it a role in the stopping of spasmodic coughs. In European herbal medicine, rue has also been taken to treat conditions as varied as hysteria, epilepsy, vertigo, colic, intestinal worms, poisoning and eye problems. The latter use is well founded, as an infusion used as an eyewash brings quick relief to strained and tired eyes, and reputedly improves the eyesight.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Antispasmodic, increases peripheral blood circulation, relieves eye tension.

67) SAGE, CLARY CLARY SAGE

Salvia sclarea (Labiatae)

HISTORY AND USES

Clary sage has been perceived both as a weaker version of its close relative, sage (*S. officinalis*), and as a significant herb in its own right. Since the seeds were once commonly used to treat eye problems, it was also known as "clear eye". An antispasmodic and aromatic plant, clary sage is used today mainly to treat digestive problems such as wind and indigestion. It is also regarded as a tonic, calming herb that helps relieve period pain and premenstrual problems. Owing to its estrogen-stimulating action, it is most effective when levels of this hormone are low.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Astringent, antiseptic, aromatic, carminative, estrogenic, reduces sweating, tonic.

68) SAGE

Salvia officinalis (Labiatae)

HISTORY AND USES

Sage grows from north to central Spain to the west of Balkans and Asia Minor. It was used in Crete in 1600 AD to clear throat

inflammation, one of its most popular uses today. Its leaves are a well-known cold germ and flu fighter. It has been found to be very effective to reduce many physical emissions like sweating and is an excellent remedy for sore throats, poor digestion and irregular periods. It is also taken as a gently stimulating tonic. It has a slightly warm, noticeably bitter and astringent taste.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Astringent, antiseptic, aromatic, carminative, estrogenic, reduces sweating, tonic.

69) SANDALWOOD

Santalum album (Santalaceae)

HISTORY AND USES

Native to eastern India, sandalwood is cultivated in South-East Asia for the extraction of wood and essential oil. Sandalwood's aroma has been highly esteemed in China and India for thousands of years. The heartwood is most often used in perfumery, but it has also been taken as a remedy in China since around AD 500. Sandalwood and its essential oil are used for their antiseptic properties in treating genito-urinary conditions such as cystitis and gonorrhoea. In India, a paste of the wood is used to soothe rashes and itchy skin. In China, sandalwood is held to be useful for chest and abdominal pain.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Antiseptic, aromatic.

70) SARSAPARILLA

Smilax spp. (Liliaceae)

HISTORY AND USES

Sarsaparilla is found in the tropical forest of the world, especially in Mexico, Peru and Brazil. There are more than 200 known species. Brought from the New World to Spain in 1563, sarsaparilla was heralded as a cure for syphilis. In Mexico, the herb has traditionally been used to treat a variety of skin problems. Sarsaparilla is anti-inflammatory and cleansing, and can bring relief to skin problems such as eczema, psoriasis and general itchiness, and help treat rheumatism, rheumatoid arthritis and gout. Sarsaparilla also has a progestrogenic action, making it beneficial in pre-menstrual problems, and menopausal conditions such as debility and depression. In Mexico the root is still frequently consumed for its reputed tonic and aphrodisiac properties. Native Amazonian peoples take sarsaparilla to

improve virility and to treat menopausal problems.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Diuretic, anti-inflammatory, anti-rheumatic.

71) SCOTS PINE

Pinus sylvestris (Pinaceae)

HISTORY AND USES

Native to the mountainous regions of Europe and north and west Asia. Its oil, extracted from the leaves, is added to disinfectants and other preparations. Scots pine leaves, taken internally, have a mildly antiseptic effect within the chest, and may also be used for arthritic and rheumatic problems. Essential oil from the leaves may be taken for asthma, bronchitis and other respiratory infections, and for digestive disorders such as wind. Scots pine branches and stems yield a thick resin, which is also antiseptic within the respiratory tract. The seeds yield an essential oil with diuretic and respiratory-stimulant properties.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Antiseptic, diuretic and anti-rheumatic.

72) SESAME

Sesamum indicum (Pedaliaceae)

HISTORY AND USES

Native to Africa, sesame is now cultivated in many tropical and sub-tropical areas of the world. In ancient Egypt, the seeds were eaten and also pressed to yield oil, which was burned in lamps and used to make ointments. Sesame is used in China to redress afflictions of the liver and kidneys. The seeds are prescribed for problems such as dizziness, tinnitus (ringing in the ears), and blurred vision. Owing to their lubricating effect within the digestive tract, the seeds are also considered a remedy for constipation. Sesame seed oil benefits the skin and is used as a base for cosmetics. A decoction of the root is used in various traditions to treat coughs and asthma.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Digestive, aromatic, antispasmodic.

73) ST JOHN'S WORT

Hypericum perforatum (Guttiferae)

HISTORY AND USES

The plant is native to Europe but is widely cultivated elsewhere. St. John's wort flowers at the time of the summer solstice, and in medieval Europe it was considered to have powerful magical properties that enabled it to repel evil. The most well-known action of St. John's wort is in repairing nerve damage and reducing pain and inflammation. It is taken to relieve the pain of menstrual cramps, sciatica and arthritis. Th oils is applied to inflammations, sprains, bruises and varicose veins. St. John's wort is also used to treat circulation problems, bronchitis and gout.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Antidepressant, antispasmodic, astringent, sedative, relieves pain, anti-viral.

74) TARRAGON

Artemisia dracunculus (Compositae)

HISTORY AND USES

Tarragon is probably native of southern Europe or the steppes of Asia. Historians believe that tarragon reached Europe brought into Spain by invading Mongols. Tarragon is widely used as a herb in cooking. In French, it is sometimes known as *herbe au dragon*, because of its reputed ability to cure serpent bites. While tarragon stimulates the digestion, it is reputed to be a mild sedative and has been taken to aid sleep. With its mild menstruation-inducing properties, it is taken if periods are delayed. The root has traditionally been applied to aching teeth.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Anti-inflammatory, digestive.

75) TEA TREE

Malaleuca alternifolia (Myrtaceae)

Tea tree is native to Australia and is now cultivated extensively. Tea tree, and in particular its essential oil, is one of the most important natural antiseptics. Useful for stings, burns, wounds and skin infections of all kinds, the herb merits a place in every medicine chest. Its therapeutic properties were first researched during the 1920s and it is now widely used in Europe and the US, as well as in Australia.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Antiseptic, antibacterial, anti-fungal, anti-viral.

76) THYME

Thymus vulgaris (Labiatae)

HISTORY AND USES

Thyme occurs in the west Mediterranean to the southwest Italy. The herb was known to the Sumerians, used by the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans. Thyme was praised by the herbalist Nicholas Culpeper (1616-1654) as "a notable strengthener of the lungs". Its main medicinal application is in treating coughs and clearing congestion. Many current formulas for mouth washes and vapor rubs contain thymol, one of the constituents found in thyme. It also improves digestion, destroys intestinal parasites and is an excellent antiseptic and tonic.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Antiseptic, tonic, relieves muscle spasm, expectorant.

77) TURMERIC

Curcuma longa syn. *C. domestica* (Zingiberaceae)

HISTORY AND USES

Turmeric is native to India and southern Asia where it is extensively cultivated. Best known for its bright yellow color and spicy taste to lovers of Indian food, its medicinal value is not so well known. However, recent research has confirmed the effects traditionally associated in ancient practices in the treatment of digestive and liver problems. The herb has also been shown to inhibit blood-clotting, relieve inflammatory conditions and help lower cholesterol levels.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Stimulates secretion of bile, anti-inflammatory, eases stomach pain, antioxidant, antibacterial.

78) VALERIAN

Valeriana officinalis (Valerianaceae)

HISTORY AND USES

Valerian is native to Europe and western Asia. The medicinal properties of valerian were well known at least since Roman times. Valerian root is a general tranquilizer used for relieving nervous tension, insomnia and headaches. Valerian decreases muscular spasm, being useful in cases of nervous digestion, bowel syndrome, stomach and menstrual cramps. Valerian helps relieve stress and has become an increasingly popular remedy in recent

decades. It is a safe, non-addictive relaxant that reduces nervous tension and anxiety and promotes restful sleep.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Sedative, relaxant, relieves muscle spasm, relieves anxiety, lowers blood pressure.

79) VERBENA

Verbena officinalis (Verbenaceae)

HISTORY AND USES

Native of Europe, verbena is extensively cultivated in other countries. Verbena has long been credited with magical properties and was used in ceremonies by the Romans, Druids of ancient Britain and Gaul. It is a traditional herbal medicine in both China and Europe. Verbena is used in mouth washes for infected gums and as a poultice for hemorrhoids. A tea has been used as a nerve tonic, to treat insomnia and to help digestion. D It has tonic, restorative properties, and is used to relieve stress and anxiety, and to improve digestive function.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Nervine, tonic, mild sedative, stimulates bile secretion, mild bitter.

80) WHITE WILLOW

Salix alba (Salicaceae)

HISTORY AND USES

White willow is native to Europe but is also found in North Africa and Asia. White willow is an excellent remedy for arthritic and rheumatic pain, affecting the joints like knees and hips. Famous as the original source of salicylic acid, first isolated in 1838 and synthetically produced in the laboratory in 1899, white willow and closely related species have been used for thousands of years in Europe, Africa, Asia and North America to relieve joint pain and manage fevers. The Greek physician Discorides in the 1st century AD, suggested taking "willow leaves, mashed with a little pepper and drunk with wine" to relieve lower back pain.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Anti-inflammatory, analgesic, reduces fever, anti-rheumatic, astringent.

81) WORMWOOD

Artemisia absinthium (Compositae)

HISTORY AND USES

Native to Europe, wormwood was called *absintium* by the Romans, what means "bitter". Wormwood leave's primary uses is to stimulate the gallbladder, help prevent and release stones, and to adjust digestive malfunctions. It also increases bile secretion and is useful in expelling intestinal worms. It is taken in small doses and sipped, the intensely bitter taste playing an important part in its therapeutic effect. In the past, wormwood was one of the main flavorings of vermouth (whose name derives from the German for wormwood).

MAIN PROPERTIES: Aromatic bitter, stimulates secretion of bile, anti-inflammatory, eliminates worms, eases stomach pains, mild antidepressant.

82) WILD THYME

Thymus serpyllum (Labiatae)

HISTORY AND USES

Thyme is native to the west Mediterranean to southwest Italy. Like its close relative thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*), wild thyme is strongly antiseptic and anti-fungal. It may be taken as an infusion or syrup to treat flu and colds, sore throats, coughs, whooping cough, chest infections, and bronchitis. Wild thyme has anti-catarrhal properties and helps clear a stuffy nose, sinusitis, ear congestion and related complaints. It has been used to expel thread worms and roundworms in children, and is used to settle wind and colic. Wild thyme's antispasmodic action makes it useful and is used to settle wind and colic. Wild thyme is also used in herbal baths and pillows.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Antiseptic, anti-fungal, antispasmodic.

83) YARROW

Achillea millefolium (Compositae)

HISTORY AND USES

Yarrow is a native European plant, with a long history as a wound healer. In classical times, it was known as *herba militaris*, being used to staunch war wounds. It has long been taken as a strengthening bitter tonic and all kinds of bitter drinks have been made from it. Yarrow helps recovery from colds and flu and is

beneficial for hay fever. It is also helpful for menstrual problems and circulatory disorders.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Antispasmodic, astringent, bitter tonic, increases sweating, lowers blood pressure, reduces fever, mild diuretic and urinary antiseptic.

84) YLANG -YLANG

Canananga odorata syn. *Canangium odoratum* (Annonaceae)

HISTORY AND USES

Ylang-ylang is native to Indonesia and the Philippines. The flowers are a traditional adornment in the Far East. Their scent is thought to have aphrodisiac qualities. The flowers and essential oil are sedative and antiseptic. The oil has a soothing effect, and its main therapeutic uses are to slow an excessively fast heart rate and to lower blood pressure. With its reputation as an aphrodisiac, ylang-ylang may be helpful in treating impotence.

MAIN PROPERTIES: Antiseptic, aromatic, regulates blood pressure