

Herbs

Mint (mentha)

Native to the Mediterranean region

Then: Gerard describes mint as "a marvelous wholesome for the stomacke...it stayeth the hicket [hiccup]...is good against watery eyes and a sure remedy for children's sore heads."

Parkinson touts mint boiled with "mackerell and other fish" and its use, when dried, "among pease that are boyled for pottage." Culpeper tells us mint would dry up excess milk in nurses and, taken in wine, would help women in childbearing.

Used for freshening breath.

And Now: Mint has numerous culinary uses--in sauces, jellies, syrups, teas and drinks. It repels mice and insects. As a health and beauty aid, it is used in skin care products and for oily hair.

Parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*)

Parsley garnishes many a restaurant plate today, but in Colonial times, cooks seasoned food with parsley and prized the herb as a health tonic. Viancour also believes parsley was used as a dye, producing a green color. A little parsley goes a long way, so for most modern home gardens, one plant provides sufficient fresh parsley to enjoy in culinary dishes as well as for drying and storing.

Lemon Balm (melissa)

Then: Lemon balm, according to Gerard, is good against "the bitings of venomous beasts." The juice "glueth together" green wounds. Parkinson advises lemon balm steeped in ale against "suddaine qualmes or passions of the heart" while Culpeper notes it will break boils and expel the afterbirth.

And Now: Kitchen uses include teas, wines, liqueurs, vinegars, and in fruit salads and fish dishes. Lemon balm may be added to potpourri and furniture polish.

Thyme (thymus)

Mediterranean

Then: According to Gerard, there was almost nothing thyme could not cure: "It bringeth downe the desired sickness, provoketh urine and applied in bathes it procureth sweat; being boyled in wine it helpeth the ague, stayeth the hicket, breaketh the stones in the bladder; it helpeth lethargie, frensie and madness and stayeth the vomiting of bloud...is good against the wambling and gripings of the bellie, ruptures, convulsions and inflammation of the liver." Culpeper noted that thyme was good for worms, warts, and dull sight.

Colonists used it as an antiseptic. Kept butter from going rancid, and used as a flavoring.

And Now: Thyme is known as the "blending herb" for its ability to pull flavors together. Cooks use it in salads, stews, soups, sauces, meats, eggs, vegetables and cheeses. In the home, it is a disinfectant and insect repellent. As a health and beauty aid, it may be used for skin care, dandruff and hangovers.

Lavender (lavendula)

Mediterranean

Then: Used by Romans. Cleopatra supposedly soaked the sails of her ships in lavender oil.

Colonists: Protected fabric from moths. Air freshener. Strewing. Tea for headache, gas

Gerard found the distilled water of lavender "virtuous," whether it be "smelt unto or the temples and forehead bathed therewith." Parkinson noted lavender's use in perfuming linen, apparel, gloves and leather, while Culpeper found this herb useful for falling sickness or giddiness of the brain.

And Now: Lavender has been baked into cakes, cookies and muffins and used to make jellies, teas and vinegars. In the home, it is added to potpourri and bouquets and used as an insect repellent.

Yarrow (achillea)

Then: Yarrow's leaves, according to Gerard, close up wounds and staunch bleeding. The whole plant -- especially the flower heads -- served as a natural dye. Culpeper tells us that a decoction of yarrow, used to bathe the head, "stayeth the shedding of hair."

And Now: In the home and garden, yarrow attracts beneficial insects and speeds composting.

Sage (salvia)

Mediterranean

Then: Gerard found sage "singular good for the head and braine; it quickeneth the senses, strengtheneth the sinewes...and cleanseth the blood." Parkinson touted its use "for teeming women, to helpe them the better forward in their childbearing." Culpeper tells us sage was useful against snakebite and would turn hair black. In ancient days, sage was thought to improve mental disorders, digestion and to aid in lengthening life. The Romans also used it as an aid in conception. At a later period sage was used to help in snake bites. At one time, the Chinese traded their green tea for sage. Native Americans mixed sage with bear grease to make a salve to treat sore throats.

Colonists used much sage for flavoring, as a tea for sore throat and infected gums. **And Now:** Sage is useful in digesting rich foods. It may be added to vegetables, meats, eggs, breads and vinegars. In the home, it is an antiseptic cleaning solution.

Basil (mint family)

Native to Africa, Asia and Middle East. Also called St. Josephwort, was grown for commercial use in Virginia before the American Revolution. Used as a flavoring, particularly in salads and soups, pea soup, the clove fragrance of basil improved the taste of foods. Also a strewing herb. And the leaves were dried for use in snuff to relieve headaches and colds.

BEE BALM (Monarda)

Used for bee Stings. Bee Balm is a member of the mint family. It is native to North America but colonists soon sent seeds to Europe for their friends to plant and enjoy. Tea brewed from its leaves was called Oswego tea and was used as a substitute for china tea after the 1773 Boston Tea Party. The flowers really do attract butterflies and hummingbirds.

Angelica

Angelica archangelica

Native to Northern Europe

It was said that at some time in the Middle Ages, a monk had a dream in which an angel spoke to him and told him this herb could cure the plague. That is how angelica acquired its name. A tea was made from the dried young leaves, roots, seeds and stems, and was used medicinally to aid in bronchial problems, to relieve colds and to calm the nerves. The stalks which contain pectin were chewed to help in digestion. The stems were boiled and used as flavorings for Christmas puddings, candies and other desserts. The was extracted from the roots and seeds, and used Angelica to flavor liqueurs such as Benedictine, and also in bitters and tobacco.

Calendula, Pot marigold (*Calendula officinalis*)

Mediterranean

The Romans grew calendulas not only for their beauty but also to relieve scorpion bites. The early Christians often gave the name of the Virgin Mary to any plant that they thought was especially beautiful. This plant was once called "Golde", then Marygold and finally Marigold or Pot Marigold to differentiate it from the regular marigolds. European settlers used it medicinally to stop bleeding and promote healing. An ointment made from the blossoms was used as a dressing for wounds, and to relieve the pain from bee and wasp stings. This ointment was still in use during the Civil War. It was also said to be useful in curing various ailments such as fevers and digestive problems. Today, the blossoms are used for food coloring and the petals are added to salads and for flavoring in soups, dumplings, puddings and wine.

Borage (*Borago officinalis*)

Plant Characteristics: This annual herb is native to the Mediterranean region. Its flowers, usually blue but sometimes pink or white, bloom from June to October.

Plant Uses: Culinary: Fresh Borage flowers were used as decorations in drinks.

Medicinal: From ancient through colonial times, the edible leaves were used to support feelings of health and courage. An “infusion” of Borage flowers were used to treat fevers, bronchitis, and diarrhea. Today, the plant is commercially cultivated for Borage seed oil, which has many health properties.

Sassafras (*sassafras albidum*)

is a deciduous tree, native to eastern North America and eastern Asia. It grows from 30–59 ft tall and spreads 25–39 ft. The trunk grows 28–59 in. in diameter.

The smooth, orange-brown bark of the mature trunk is thick, red-brown, and deeply furrowed. The wood is light, hard, and sometimes brittle. All parts of the plants are very fragrant. Steam distillation of dried root bark produces an essential oil that once was extensively used as a fragrance in perfumes and soaps, in food and for aromatherapy. The dried and ground leaves are used to make filé powder, an ingredient used in some types of gumbo. The roots of sassafras can be steeped to make tea which can be used as an anticoagulant. Some sassafras root extracts are widely used commercially in teas and root



beers.

During the establishment of the Virginia Colony, including Jamestown in the 17th century, sassafras was a major export commodity to England. A medicinal root and a wood prized for its beauty and durability, sassafras was popular from its first import by Sir Walter Raleigh in 1602 until the 18th century. During a brief period in the early 17th century, sassafras was the second-largest export from America behind tobacco. Additionally, throughout history, sassafras wood has been found to be an excellent fire-starter because of the flammability of its natural oils.

Rosemary (rosmarinus)

Then: Gerard tells us that the distilled water of rosemary, drunk morning and evening, "taketh away the stench of the mouth and the breath." Parkinson notes its "civill uses...at weddings, funerals, etc., to bestow among friends." And, according to Culpeper, "to burn the herb in houses and chambers correcteth the air in them."

And Now: In the kitchen, rosemary flavors meats, vegetables, eggs, cheeses and marinades. It may be added to potpourri or used to make an antiseptic cleaning solution. Medicinally, it is used in skin care, as a hair rinse, for sore throat, muscle and joint pain, wounds and bruises.

Clary Sage (salvia sclarea)

During colonial times, Clary Sage was often popularly referred to as 'clear eye.' Although used to season food and to treat a number of ailments, it was particularly valued for its role in cleansing eyes.

When soaked in water, Clary seeds become mucilaginous. Colonists would place a bit of this slippery substance in an irritated eye to attract tiny debris and make it easier to remove.

Colonists brought Clary Sage from Europe where it had been used for centuries as a folk remedy for a number of health problems. In 1653, the English botanist Nicholas Culpeper published his Complete Herbal, which contains a page the plant.

Culpeper listed numerous uses for various parts of the plant to treat problems such as back pain, delayed menstruation and indigestion. He noted that the seed mucilage could also be used topically for drawing out splinters and thorns. Culpeper also wrote that powdered Clary seeds mixed with wine 'is an admirable help to provoke lust.' Clearly, Clear Eye was an all-purpose solution

