

# GROW *your own* MEDICINE



*A guide to growing health-giving  
plants in your own backyard*

MIM BEIM

***To Bill. My Love.***

## IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Your health is your responsibility. While this book is intended as a general information resource and all care has been taken in compiling the contents, it does not take account of individual circumstances and it is not in any way a substitute for medical advice from your qualified healthcare practitioner. Nor is it intended to directly or indirectly prescribe the use of any remedy without the consent of your healthcare practitioner. The diagnosis and treatment of illness should always be made in consultation with a healthcare practitioner. Do not make any adjustments to prescribed medication without their approval. The author and the publisher cannot be held responsible for any claim or action that may arise from reliance on the information contained in this book.

# Contents

Cover

Preface

How to use this book

Part One: Growing and using medicinal plants

Growing medicinal plants: The basics

Making and taking your own medicine

Part Two: An A to Z of medicinal plants

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Contents

Appendices

Acknowledgements

Bibliography

INDEX

About the Author

Copyright

## Preface

If Hippocrates, the man who said ‘Let thy food be thy medicine, and thy medicine food’, was around today, he’d be dancing a jig for joy. There is change afoot. So many more people today are interested in eating fresh, good produce; millions of dollars are being invested in research into the health benefits of food and plants; and, most interestingly, more people are becoming disenchanted with popping pills for a quick fix, and starting to realise that health is a personal responsibility, and that what we eat can influence our wellbeing.

*Grow Your Own Medicine* is born from this change of thinking. Good health should be our natural condition. Illness is a sign of imbalance. If a good diet, exercise and emotional wellbeing are not enough to redress this imbalance, medicine may be required. Plant medicine is humankind’s oldest form of healing. It suits a wide range of conditions. And you can grow it in your own backyard or on your balcony.

The simple activity that is capable of sustaining life, that is, the tending of plants, is almost instinctive, but once you begin this addictive pastime you realise there is much to learn. From the nature of individual plants to the importance of soil quality, and from which insects are to be encouraged and which shunned, to perfecting the art of composting, you will find your garden flourishes with your increasing knowledge. There are few things more fulfilling than planting a tiny seed in the soil and watching as it grows, transforming into a beautiful plant. But, much like life really, the journey that is gardening is strewn with delights and frustrations. One moment you could be enjoying the fruit of your labour — nibbling on a leaf of rocket, or admiring the beauty of echinacea flowers you have grown from seed — and the next, mourning the loss of an entire carrot crop, or dealing with a plague

of thrips. Gardening is its own form of therapy. And growing medicinal plants nourishes the soul and the body.

If you would like more energy, want to prevent and treat illness or injury, and encourage a deeper connection to the earth, *Grow Your Own Medicine* is for you.

## **HEALING WITH NATURE**

Plant medicine, or phytomedicine, is humankind's oldest form of medicine. We have always used the food and herbs we have cultivated or collected to heal our various ills. Ötzi, the 5000-year-old Neolithic man discovered buried frozen solid in the Austrian Alps, was found to have eaten birch leaves just before his death. Birch leaves are a remedy for treating intestinal parasites, still used today in that region. Unfortunately, Ötzi died from a blow to the head before he could thank his local herbalist.

Modern plant medicine is now backed up by rigorous scientific studies. For example, St John's wort has been found to be as effective as Prozac for mild to moderate depression. In Germany today, St John's wort makes up 25 per cent of all prescriptions for depression by MDs.

Unlike today's mainstream medicine, which is often based on treating one symptom in isolation, plant medicine is focused on harnessing the body's innate urge towards wellness, also known as life force. For instance, for a bad chest cold, rather than treating with antibiotics, plants such as echinacea or garlic will not only be antibiotic (kill the germs), they will also increase the activity of the body's immune system, helping to beat this infection and ward off future ones. This is not to say that antibiotics are not indicated in many conditions, but it's rather nice to have a range of options. Natural medicine in general aims at treating the cause of illness, as well as the symptoms.

The body likes to maintain a state of balance. This is called homeostasis. Our body temperature averages 37.5°C. A few degrees hotter, we have a fever; a few degrees colder, we will suffer

hypothermia — both potentially fatal. The same relatively narrow band applies to blood pressure, blood glucose level, hormones and pH. In good health we are magicians at walking the tightrope of homeostasis. Plant medicine helps us maintain this balance.

Over 30 per cent of the pharmaceutical drugs used today started life inside a plant, including aspirin and digoxin. The original plant material has been transformed into very small compounds that can often be created synthetically in a laboratory. The resulting pharmacological preparation bears no resemblance to the original plant. Herbalists believe that the healing power of plants is down to more than just one chemical, no matter how marvellous that chemical can seem in experiments. Herbalists believe there is a greater power in using the synergy of the whole flower or leaves or indeed whole plant; in other words, the total beneficial effect of the plant is often greater than the sum of the individual chemical parts. Using one chemical in isolation is not as nature intended. The solution is simple: eat and grow vegetables, fruit and herbs; consume them as they grow from the soil; and use these as your medicine.

## How to use this book

*Grow Your Own Medicine* is the complete compendium for those who wish to nourish and heal themselves using plants that can be grown at home.

It is not intended to be read from front to back. Rather, dip into the bits that most interest you. For instance, if you suffer from insomnia, look up ‘insomnia’ or ‘sleep’ in the index and be guided to the plants that relieve this condition. Or you could be influenced by your garden. Perhaps it is awash with peppermint? In this case, refer to ‘peppermint’ in the A to Z of Medicinal Plants, and find out how this herb is good for your health — and flatulence.

Part one of *Grow Your Own Medicine* is about the hands-on process of creating your own medicinal garden. It is aimed at the novice gardener, whether blessed with a large yard or a handkerchief balcony. You will learn about the ins and outs of soils and seeds, which fertilisers are best to use, how to mulch and companion planting — who likes whom in the vegie patch. Explore the world of worms and compost and become acquainted with the various common pests and diseases that can blight even the best-tended garden, and how to treat these problems without chemicals.

Once your plants have been harvested, the next adventure begins — creating your own medicine. Plant remedies lend themselves to a wide range of applications, from making a soothing cup of chamomile or peppermint tea, or a delicious juice with ginger, carrot and beetroot, to snipping green leaves and freshly grown sprouts for the salad bowl. Then there is the alchemy of making tinctures, a traditional form of herbal medicine, which taste as nasty as good medicine should. Find out about the sticky business of making ointments and creams, good for cuts and sores, or pounding poultices and compresses — brilliant for bruises and broken bones.

Part two of the book brings you a host of healing plants, from alfalfa sprouts and pomegranates to dandelions and turmeric. Traditionally known as a *materia medica*, this section explores the therapeutic nature of each plant. Additionally, it explains which part of the plant to use — root, leaf, fruit or flower — any historical notes of interest, which conditions are best treated by this plant and in what form — tincture, tea, cream, poultice, or just eaten at dinner time. Then follows specific information on growing conditions and any special requirements.

At the beginning of each plant entry there is a handy table which summarises the key points, including how easily grown the plant is and which climate zones are suitable (most plants chosen are relatively easy to grow in Australia). Also here are other plants that are commonly used in combination, which is the way herbalists often create their remedies. For example, aloe vera and calendula are excellent plant partners used together to help heal cuts or mild burns.

The appendices offer additional information, from suggestions about planting medicinal gardens to the health benefits of fruit and vegetable juices, which will taste all the better if home grown. Also here is a list of places where you can find further information, seeds and plants.

#### **A NOTE ABOUT SELECTION**

The plants in the A to Z section were chosen for a number of reasons. First and most importantly, they had to be therapeutic. Better still if they helped a number of conditions simultaneously, for instance garlic guards against heart disease as well as relieving coughs and colds. Another key criterion was how easily the plant would grow in the average Australian garden, by the average Australian gardener (if such a place and person exist). And finally, more brownie points if the plant could be included in the diet, whether it be broccoli or beetroot, tomato or thyme. The odd one out is honey. Not a plant, but derived from plants by bees, and certainly a formidable healing agent.

*The Lord hath created medicines out of the earth; and he that is wise will not abhor them.*

*Ecclesiasticus 38:4*

# **PART ONE**

## **Growing and using medicinal plants**

## Growing medicinal plants: The basics

**Y**our gardening experience can be as easy or as difficult as you choose. It's best to decide from the start how much of a commitment you wish to make. It could be as little as a jar of sprouts on the kitchen windowsill or a couple of pots containing herbs on the balcony; or as big as a purpose-built raised garden bed or creating an orchard in the back paddock.

A couple of side benefits of gardening are gaining new skills and meeting people. Each time your garden provides you with a question — for instance, 'why are the leaves on my lemon tree turning yellow?' — you will be driven to find the answer. The answer may well be within this or another gardening book, a radio or television show, or — more than likely — someone you know, knows someone who is a whiz at gardening and would love to help out. Another source of information (as well as seeds, plants and solace) is your local nursery, where you will find qualified and passionate horticulturists who invariably give you another precious parcel of knowledge for your growing pile. They might tell you that the reason your lemon leaves are turning yellow is due to a nitrogen deficiency ... and suggest you go and urinate on the lemon tree immediately.

In addition to the health benefits of growing your own medicine, many people find gardening deeply relaxing and use it as a regular form of meditation. We are, after all, creatures of the earth. There are few more satisfying and nurturing times than those spent mooching around the garden, basking in some early morning sunshine, getting dirt underneath your fingernails. Can't get much closer to nature than that. The connection between health and horticulture is recognised in Horticultural Therapy, developed in the 1970s, which incorporates the healing powers of growing and

tending plants into the lives of trauma victims, those with Alzheimer's disease, and others.

If you are new to gardening, the best advice is to start on a modest scale and, as you learn the craft, you will crave new challenges.

## **PLANNING YOUR MEDICINAL GARDEN**

Your garden is a reflection of your personality. Is your garden full of colour, neat and orderly, interspersed with interesting architectural forms, or is it completely bonkers? Go for it, is the best advice. Gardening is a lot like life. You live and learn, and learn by your mistakes. The beauty of gardening is that your mistakes can go into the compost bin rather than a quarterly performance review.

Like most ventures, it pays to have a plan. Start with a set of goals. What do you want from your medicinal garden? Plants that double as vegetables and flowers for the home? Choose globe artichokes and echinacea for stunning floral arrangements. A place for the children and pets to play? Choose chamomile, rosemary and thyme for them to romp on. Or you may be keen to create a home-grown medicine cabinet for your family? Choose aloe, calendula and comfrey. For some more ideas, see page 260.

Another aspect is time. How much do you have? If you only have two to three hours a week, then it's best to start with one raised garden bed, and expand when time allows. Also important is matching plants to your garden site or position. For example, if your garden is mostly shady and cool, then choose plants that thrive in these conditions rather than tropical sun-lovers that will only curl up their toes. If you don't have a large area, don't despair of creating a beautiful medicinal garden; containers on a balcony are just fine.

## **PLANT NAMES**

What's with the hard-to-pronounce Latin names? Why not just use the name 'dandelion' rather than *Taraxacum officinale*? Although obviously it's easier to use the common name of a plant, there are

reasons why plants have been classified in a very specific way. Common plant names can vary from country to country, and each language has a different word (or words) for the same plant. This is where the binomial system of naming plants comes in very handy. Developed by Swedish naturalist Carolus (Carl) Linnaeus (1707–1778) to name all species, the binomial system is used throughout the world. By the way, whenever a plant with traditional healing properties has ‘*officinale*’ or ‘*officinalis*’ in its botanical name, it means it is regarded as the medicinal form.

### **WHEN IN DOUBT, DON'T**

For each plant entry in *Grow Your Own Medicine*, the correct botanical name is given in the ‘At a glance’ table, as well as the common name, that is, the name commonly used. If you are intending to use a plant for medicine, it is important to ensure that you are using the right plant. If you are buying the plant from a nursery, the botanical nomenclature is always on the label. As the botanical name is precise and used globally, this is insurance that the plant in the pot is the plant you are after. However, if you are taking cuttings from friends, or finding your medicine in paddocks and fields, take a leaf, flower or (better still) the whole plant to a nursery where a horticulturist can identify it. As a general rule, when in doubt, don't. After all, some poisonous toadstools can look like delicious mushrooms, with dire consequences for the diner.

### **CONTAINER GROWING**

Not everyone has a large garden. Growing your plants in containers is just fine. Most medicinal plants, with the exception of larger trees, will do very nicely in a pot on a sunny balcony. Choose from a variety of containers, from elegant glazed pots or terracotta tubs to rustic wine barrels sawn in half. Make sure your pot has enough room for the plant to stretch its roots. Ensure adequate drainage by lifting the container above the ground, perching it on pieces of broken tile or clay feet. Plants in pots dry out more quickly than those in the ground. To avoid this, mix water-holding crystals with

the potting soil, use mulch and keep a close eye on soil moisture. Pot plants need fertilising, but it is easy to over-fertilise. Slow-release fertilising granules are the best way to go.

#### **FIVE TIPS**

- Find as large a container as possible, particularly if the plant has deep roots
- Use good-quality potting mix and slow-release fertiliser
- Water frequently, and combine soil with wetting crystals
- Re-pot when needed, generally every year
- Raise the container above ground to ensure adequate drainage

## **COMPOST**

Composting is the alchemy of gardening — transforming waste into fertile, sweet-smelling soil. A dollop of compost enriches and improves the soil. Compost can be used as both fertiliser and mulch. Composting is not difficult. Basically anything organic (i.e. that has been alive) and biodegradable (i.e. can break down) can be used to make compost. Organic matter is broken down by a large community of small organisms including bacteria, fungi and earthworms. Before you know it, your kitchen scraps have become valuable compost.

Compost piles can be made outside in large heaps, confined in three-sided pens or created in purpose-made compost bins or tumblers. Ideally, it's best to have two compost piles or bins on the go at any one time. One is busy composting, while the other is being filled. Compost takes about one to two months to form, depending on the content, the size and the season. Warm weather speeds up the work of the soil organisms. Compost tumblers can reduce the time to fourteen days, while a very large open pile could take six months to break down. If using a bin, always place on bare earth rather than concrete, so the organisms already present in the ground can also join in the fun. But even apartment dwellers can compost. Small bins are available, sold with a culture of compost-making

organisms. High-rise gardeners can now create compost from kitchen waste easily and cleanly.

### **Making your own compost**

The golden rule is if it has once been alive, you can add it to compost. However, bones and too much meat can attract vermin. Other things to avoid are oils, cheeses, and pet and human faeces. It's also best to avoid adding weeds, especially weeds containing seeds. Although theoretically they should decompose, there is a risk of reincarnation — tomato seeds often sprout from compost; seedlings can be left to flourish, or easily weeded. It is best to cut or shred material into small pieces to maximise surface area for the organisms to get their teeth into. Avoid having a solid mass of any one ingredient, like leaves or lawn clippings. Also desist from adding diseased plants, or those that have been sprayed with toxic pesticides or herbicides. Not nice for us, nor compost.

### ***Compost ingredients***

- Manure: poultry, horse, sheep, pig, cow, goat, pigeon
- Paper (shredded)
- Grass clippings
- The odd dead goldfish or mouse
- Straw
- Tea leaves, coffee grounds
- Compost activators: dandelions, comfrey, nettles, seaweed, yarrow
- Vegetable and fruit scraps
- Urine
- Bread, rice, pasta

Place compost ingredients in layers approximately 20 cm deep. This allows sufficient aeration so the organisms don't suffocate. Start with a layer of wet ingredients, such as kitchen scraps, followed by a dry layer such as shredded paper, followed by a layer of manure. Wet, dry, manure ... wet, dry, manure ad nauseam. To further increase aeration, turn the tumbler or turn the pile with a garden

fork a few times a week. For bins, use a garden fork, or there are compost turners available that look like giant corkscrews and are very efficient. Another aeration technique is to insert a section of agricultural pipe with drainage holes into the centre of the compost bin at the beginning of each composting cycle.

When made correctly, the compost heap should be quite hot in the centre. The larger the heap, the hotter it will be. This will kill pathogenic organisms, weeds and seeds. You can increase the rate of microorganism activity by adding plants known as compost activators, including comfrey, yarrow, nettles and seaweed. You will know when your compost is cooked when it looks, feels and smells like sweet black soil.

#### **FIVE TIPS**

- Cut up or shred ingredients so they are not too big for the microorganisms
- Layering: wet, dry, manure
- Create layers not more than 20 cm deep
- Aerate compost, turning or tumbling a few times a week
- Allow the pile to be large enough to generate heat to kill pathogens and weeds

#### **FERTILISERS**

Fertilisers supplement the soil with nutrients. One could ask why there is a need to supplement the soil when plants have been doing very nicely on their own for millions of years, in the time Before Fertilisers (BF). There are several reasons. Firstly, gardens designed by humans are not as nature intended. BF, rarely in nature were so many plants of the same species concentrated together as in today's vegetable patches or hectares of grain. Similar plants require similar nutrients, depleting the soil of those nutrients. Secondly, BF, plants would die and decompose where they grew, allowing the natural return of nutrients into the soil. Now the whole plant is removed each season, with new plants sown immediately after. BF, there was

no pampering as there is today, such as regular watering and protection from wind and frost, so fewer plants would have survived, reducing demand on soil resources. Additionally, BF, various animals would be at liberty to defecate and/or die in the natural 'garden', providing manure and the original blood and bone fertiliser. And finally, Australia is a special case. We are the oldest continent on the planet, and our soils have had longer to be depleted of their original nutrients by erosion.

### **Fertiliser nutrients**

Plants require around thirty different nutrients, mainly minerals, for good health. These include the *major* elements nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P) and potassium (K); the *minor* elements calcium (Ca), magnesium (Mg) and sulphur (S); and the *trace* elements iron (Fe), manganese (Mn), copper (Cu), zinc (Zn), boron (B), molybdenum (Mo), cobalt (Co) and sodium (Na). Applying fertiliser is a lot like us taking a vitamin supplement if we are run down, or to prevent us from getting sick.

Fertilisers are either natural or chemical. Natural fertilisers include seaweed extract, fish emulsion, manure, worm castings, blood and bone, minced carp and compost. They contain the major, minor and trace elements as well as a whole bunch of other stuff. Natural fertilisers release nutrients into the soil over a long period.

Chemical fertilisers are simple combinations of several of the major, minor and trace elements like potassium chloride, potassium sulphate and ammonium (nitrogen). Chemical fertilisers are soluble and release their nutrients rather quickly into the soil. In general, application of the natural fertilisers at certain times of the year is all your plants need. However, occasionally a plant may have 'special needs', such as when the soil in your area is deficient in one or more nutrients. For example, where there is a magnesium deficiency, Epsom salts (magnesium sulphate) may be indicated.

Knowing which fertilisers are needed when comes with experience — and lots of trips to the local nursery holding wilting and discoloured leaves. The general rule is to apply a natural

fertiliser four times a year, and when a particular plant looks ill, that is the time to do some detective work.

Fertilisers come in different forms: liquids, powders and granules. Always follow the directions on the container as you can kill your plants with kindness by over-fertilising. Always apply fertiliser prior to rain or watering to encourage absorption into the soil and roots. To avoid burning, don't place fertiliser too close to the stem or trunk. Apply to the drip line under trees, that is, the area under the foliage.

### **Green manure**

Green manure is a special kind of fertiliser. It is a crop of nutrient-rich leguminous plants that instead of being harvested are ploughed back into the earth, returning all the nutrients to the soil to enrich it for the next crop. Legumes are 'nitrogen fixing'. This means they concentrate nitrogen levels in the soil — nitrogen is one of the more desirable nutrients. Growing green manure is best done at the end of summer before your next crop of plants. Apply the seeds of quick-growing, nutrient-rich plants such as barley, alfalfa, red clover, lupins, mustard and peas. Just before flowering occurs at around six to eight weeks, dig the legumes back into the earth, cover with cow manure and, after a good feed and rest, in a few weeks the plot is replenished and ready for sowing. It is possible to buy bags of mixed green manure seeds.

#### **FIVE TIPS**

- Find out if your plant has specific fertilising needs
- Fertilise before rain or watering to ensure best absorption
- Don't over-fertilise or you will risk killing your plants with kindness
- Pot plants do best with slow-release fertiliser granules
- Keep fertiliser away from the stem to avoid burning, but apply up to the drip line under trees

## CLIMATE

The climate where you live pretty much determines what plants you can grow. Some plants tolerate frosts, while others take one whiff of cool air and check out. The highest and lowest temperatures are the most important factors, as the extremes are what cause the most problems. One frost can devastate a crop of basil, while a 45°C day can wipe out all your tomatoes. Other factors, including latitude, altitude, and wind velocity and direction, will also have an impact on which plants are suitable for your site, and how well they will do. Best to speak to the horticulturist at your council, or folk at the local nursery or gardening club who will be familiar with which plants thrive in your area.

Australia can be broadly divided into six climate zones. This is a useful guide to understanding which plants will thrive, and those you should not bother planting. The zones are identified here (see the map opposite) and you will notice that each plant entry in *Grow Your Own Medicine* is given a designated zone from 1 to 6.

If conditions are not ideal, yet you are still keen on growing a particular plant, you can contrive a microclimate. For instance, if your site is beset by cold southerly winds but you have your heart set on growing pineapples, one solution may be to build a brick or stone wall to retain the heat, painting it a pale colour to reflect the light. Plant your pineapple on the northern side of the wall and *voilà*, you have the perfect spot to enjoy your pina colada. In hot climes, a pond or water feature with some shade trees will cool things down by several degrees. In frost-prone areas, create a temporary microclimate to protect a tender plant by covering it with a hessian bag or plastic bin on the nights a frost is likely, taking this cover off during the day.



## MULCH

Mulch is simply a layer of material placed over the soil. It is a gardener's best friend. A thick covering of mulch will kill most weeds, saving backbreaking time spent weeding. As it reduces evaporation from the soil, mulch reduces the need for watering — something to aspire to in these times of climate change. A layer of mulch acts as insulation, protecting vulnerable roots from overheating or overcooling. Mulch also stimulates the complex ecosystem of bacteria and earthworms in the soil, so important for healthy plants. And, finally, as the mulch decomposes, it releases nutrients back into the soil.

Mulch needs to be at least 5 cm thick to be effective as a weed suppressant. The best mulches are organic matter such as bark or

dead leaves. Other types of mulch include woodchips, lucerne, hay, sugar-cane straw, sawdust and aged manure (it needs to be aged so as not to burn the plants). Choosing what type of mulch depends on your plants' requirements. Herbs and vegetables do better with a nutrient-rich soft mulch, such as sugar-cane straw or lucerne, which will not damage tender stems and leaves.

Woodchips and bark chips are an excellent choice of mulch for larger areas. The only problem is that the soil microbes emigrate to the woodchips in an attempt to compost them, drawing nutrients from the soil. The well-known Australian gardener Angus Stewart has come up with an ingenious solution he calls a 'manure sandwich': place a layer of broken-down cow manure on the soil beneath the mulch. The soil will be healthier, and the mulch will last longer. Always weed the area first before applying mulch.

#### **FIVE TIPS**

- Weed the area first before applying mulch
- Mulch must be at least 5 cm thick to be effective as a weed suppressant
- Choose a mulch that suits its purpose, e.g. lucerne for vegies, bark for orchards or larger areas
- Create a manure sandwich if using wood or bark chips as mulch
- Don't forget to mulch your pot plants

## **WATERING**

Water, air and nutrients are the fundamentals of all life. With the warming of our climate, it is no longer possible or preferable to leave the sprinkler on all day. Gardeners have become water-savvy consumers. Following are some guidelines to get the most out of your watering.

First, check what, if any, water restrictions are in force in your district. You might want to consider installing a rainwater tank. Frequent, shallow watering only encourages shallow roots that quickly dry out. Better to give a good drink less often to support a

strong, deep-growing root system. Watering too often can also leach the soil of nutrients and increase the chance of fungal disease in the soil and root rot. A simple test to check whether to water is to insert your finger into the soil to judge that it is merely moist, not wet, or bone dry.

Plants in containers and newly planted or sown plants need more regular watering than established plants with established root systems. When buying seedlings or plants in pots, water them generously while still in their pots and before planting in the ground.

If you have the time and money to invest, a system of drip feeding is a good way to ensure each plant receives adequate water. This system also minimises evaporation. The best time to water your plants is early morning or evening. This allows for the least evaporation, and prevents the burning of leaves and flowers that can occur when the sun shines on the water spray. Grey water is a water-saving measure that makes sense for the environment. However, as grey water usually does contain some chemicals, it is best kept for ornamental plants and lawns rather than food or medicinal plants. Ask a plumber about the possibility of diverting grey water on your garden.

#### **FIVE TIPS**

- Water early morning or evening to prevent evaporation
- Water deeply to encourage root development
- Seedlings and potted plants are more at risk of drying out
- Don't overwater as this will lead to fungal infections and root rot
- Drip-feeding is an effective way to water

#### **PROPAGATION**

There is the thrill of buying a punnet of baby seedlings and tenderly planting them in your garden, and then there is the bigger thrill that comes from growing plants from seed or cuttings. Propagation is the art of growing new plants. Sowing seeds, taking cuttings and

dividing rootstock are various ways of propagating plants. Different plants do better with different techniques and, to save on heartache and reduce agricultural angst, sometimes it is easier to buy an established youngster from the nursery.

Seeds or seedlings? If you are a purist, you'll be attracted to starting your medicinal garden from scratch, or seed. However, seedlings have some distinct advantages: you are assured of getting healthy plants (if they don't look healthy, don't buy them!) and time is saved as the early growing has been done for you. Some of the more unusual medicinal plants will be only available as seed from specialist suppliers (see page 270).

### **Propagating from seed**

Pop seeds into small containers of seed-raising mix or straight into the soil. Most seed packets will describe how many to plant and how deep to plant them. If the seeds are very fine, place them in the centre of folded cardboard and gently tap over soil, compost or seed mix. Egg cartons make excellent seed trays or you can purchase peat pellets, which are cylindrical tablets of rich growing medium. The beauty of these is that you can plant them directly into the soil without disturbing the fragile nascent root system.

The fundamentals of germinating seeds include warmth (although there are a few cold-loving exceptions) and moisture. Water with a fine spray in order not to disturb the soil. As soon as the seedling has several leaves, transplant into a larger pot or the garden, taking care not to disturb the roots. Label which seeds you have placed in which containers, as they tend to look similar in the first few days of life. The biggest cause of failure is allowing the soil to dry out as the seeds germinate, at a time the young root system is developing.

### **Propagating from cuttings**

Some plants can be propagated in this way. Snip a stalk of the plant around 10 cm long. Remove most of the leaves and all flowers so that the energy can concentrate on growing the root system. Leaves can only develop from a node, the place where leaves join the stem. Cut the stem just below a node for root development, and just above

the node for leaves to grow. Dip the end of the stem into some hormone rooting powder or raw honey, and place into a small container of propagating mix. Plant several cuttings in the one pot, and be prepared for some infant mortality. Place under a cut-down plastic bottle or in a hothouse for five or six weeks until roots are developed and the cuttings can be transplanted into the garden bed or pot.

### **Propagating by root division**

This is possible only for some plants, but it is by far the easiest way to propagate. Simply use the edge of a spade or knife to cut through the plant, separating the root system, so you have two or more plants from the original. Remove most of the leaves and flowers before replanting so energy can be diverted to the roots. Root division is best done in autumn or winter when there is less active green growth.

#### **FIVE TIPS**

- Make a note of what seeds you plant where
- Stagger planting seeds for food crops so you don't experience feast and famine
- Use egg cartons or peat pots for easy seed germination
- When seedlings have several leaves it is time to re-pot or plant in the soil
- Seedlings and newly established plants require vigilant watering

### **SOIL**

Soil is not dirt, a term horticulturists find deeply offensive. Soil is a complex system of minerals, air, water and microorganisms. There are more microorganisms in a teaspoon of soil than there are people on earth. Soil is alive and supports a vast but tiny ecosystem, so it behoves us to treat it with care.

The minerals in soil come from rocks, including granite, basalt, shale and sandstone, that have been ground down over hundreds of thousands of years. The bedrock determines the type of soil in your area. Soils can be graded into two main groups: sand or clay. A soil that is too sandy will cause nutrients and water to fall through too quickly; a soil that is too clayey is somewhat impervious to nutrients and water, and will not let them pass to the root system for a good feed. Clay soil also becomes waterlogged, depleting the roots of oxygen and setting up a perfect environment for moulds and other diseases. Most plants thrive in a nutrient-rich, well-drained soil that allows water and nutrients to trickle through to the roots, which in turn absorb them in order to feed the plant.

An easy way to identify the structure of your soil is to take a scoopful and place it in a glass jar with a tight lid. Add water to about 2 cm from the top, fit the lid and give it a good shake. After a couple of days the soil will settle into its components: sand on the bottom, then clay, and on the top the organic matter known as humus which is comprised of bits of decaying plants, leaves and microbes.

## **WORM FARMS**

Hail the mighty worm. Worms in the soil are a sight to gladden any gardener's heart. They are a sign that all is well in the garden. Your soil is healthy, and very likely so too are your plants. Each day a worm will digest half its weight in soil. What passes through the worm, politely called worm castings, is a concentrated source of nutrients. Garden gold.

For those who want to maximise this valuable resource, worm farming is the obvious step. Worm farms are another way of composting kitchen and other refuse. They can be created from old bathtubs or any waterproof container, or purpose-built ones are available. Composting worms, used in worm farms, are a different species to earthworms and can be purchased from hardware stores, nurseries or worm enthusiasts. Worm farms take a little while to become established, but soon you will be contributing all your

kitchen scraps to those wriggly little guys. Meat, dairy, citrus and onions are the only foods to avoid (picky eaters). Use the worm castings and diluted worm wee as fertiliser.

## **COMPANION PLANTING**

Companion planting is the practice of grouping different plants together to increase growth and productivity. There is no hard scientific data about companion planting; rather, it is an art based on years of experience gathered by generations of observant gardeners. Some plants thrive when growing near other plants; others curl up their toes. There are various explanations for why this is so. Certain strong-smelling plants, such as marigolds, deter pests. Different species of plants have different length roots, feeding from different layers of soil, decreasing competition for nutrients. Or perhaps it is simply the same as it is with us. There are certain people you like to hang around with, others you simply cannot abide. Rene Maurice Gattefosse, an early twentieth-century French chemist and aromatherapist, wrote this lovely description of the relationship between thyme and lavender: 'Thyme is a faithful companion of the Lavender. It lives with it in perfect sympathy and partakes alike of its good and its bad fortune.' In *Grow Your Own Medicine*, wherever possible, companion plants have been listed in the 'At a glance' tables.

## **CROP ROTATION**

Crop rotation promotes healthy, disease-free plants. And it looks like you know what you are doing. The principle is to refrain from planting the same crop in the same place for at least a year. Each time you repeat the same crop you increase the risk of disease and soil depletion, both big no-noes in the gardening world. An excellent system is to have four garden beds, A, B, C and D. After one year, the plants in garden bed A are planted in B, B's plants are now in C and D's are in A. It's little bit like pass the parcel. By adding a legume crop now and then, e.g. broad beans or peas, nitrogen will be added to the soil.

Plants which are closely related are likely to be affected by the same diseases and pests, so it's best to crop rotate with different species or family groups, as in the table below. Crop rotation is usually applied to vegetable gardens only, as herbs are often quite resistant to pests and diseases.

Garden bed	Crops
A	Beans, peas, broccoli, brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower
B	Carrots, beetroot, onions, potatoes, turnips
C	Corn, cucumbers, pumpkins, zucchini (after harvest sow green manure)
D	Tomatoes, capsicums, eggplants

**PESTS AND DISEASES**

It is disheartening when your plants are affected by pests or disease. The healthier your plant, the more resistant it will be; however, you always need to be on the lookout for the sneaking snail or ambling aphid. Insects are part of the natural cycle, even insects we dislike. Using poisonous insecticides is a sledgehammer approach to a problem that can be solved by more earth-friendly methods. Keep an eagle eye on things so pests and diseases don't take over.

Natural predators such as birds, lizards and spiders are to be encouraged. Grow some small flowering bushes nearby to attract the birds, and include a few rocks and logs for the lizards and spiders.

--	--

Pests & diseases	Natural solutions
Ants	Sugar and borax*
Aphids	Encourage natural predators: ladybirds, birds Manually remove Pyrethrum* Soapy water*
Cabbage white butterflies	Biological control ( <i>Bacillus thuringiensis</i> )* Encourage natural predators: dragonflies, birds, lacewing larvae, centipedes, native wasps Each morning, hunt for the caterpillars on the underside of leaves and manually remove Lolo's moth repellent*

\*For more information, see Control methods.

Pests & diseases	Natural solutions
Caterpillars	Biological control ( <i>Bacillus thuringiensis</i> )* Encourage natural predators: birds, beetles, centipedes

	<p>Manually remove</p> <p>Derris dust*</p> <p>Pyrethrum*</p>
Fruit fly	Place bags made from cloth, mesh or waxed paper over individual fruit
Fungi	Milk and water spray*
Mealy bugs	<p>Encourage natural predators: ladybirds, lacewing larvae</p> <p>Scrape off with fingernail or knife</p> <p>Soapy water*</p> <p>Wipe off with rag soaked in methylated spirits and dispose of plants where roots are affected. It's too late for them so don't risk the chance of further infection</p>
Powdery mildew	Milk and water spray* Sodium bicarbonate*
Scale	<p>Encourage natural predators: bees, birds, native wasps, ladybirds</p> <p>Rub off</p> <p>White oil spray*</p>

\*For more information, see Control methods.

--	--

Pests & diseases	Natural solutions
Snails and slugs	Beer bait* Coffee grounds Create a salt perimeter Place crushed eggshells around plants you wish to protect Encourage natural predators: frogs and toads, centipedes, lizards Relocation or death by gumboot
Thrips	Encourage natural predators: birds, wasps, ladybirds Pyrethrum* Scatter wood ash around plants White oil spray*
Weeds	Mulch Plant groundcover, e.g. grevilleas, native violets Pour boiling water directly onto weed Pull out — easier after a good rain

\*For more information, see Control methods.

### Control methods

*Beer bait:* Slugs and snails are notorious boozers. Leave a couple of centimetres of beer in the bottom of a beer bottle. Bury sideways,

with the mouth of the bottle adjacent to the top of the soil. The slugs and snails will be lured to join the party and stay.

*Biological control (Bacillus thuringiensis):* A naturally occurring bacteria that only affects the butterfly family.

*Derris dust:* This is derived from the roots of certain plants. Although it is non-toxic for humans and pets, it will kill earthworms and fish; use in the late afternoon to avoid harming bees and butterflies. Use only a light dusting if necessary. The dust is an irritant to the lungs, so avoid inhaling it when applying.

*Lolo's moth repellent:* Lolo Houbein, author of *One Magic Square*, has another brilliant solution to the tricky problem of cabbage white butterflies. Apparently these butterflies are territorial and will leave the area alone if they see butterfly competition. Hammer in four stakes surrounding your susceptible plants. Tie some string around these stakes, at two or three heights. On the string, tie faux butterflies at 5 cm intervals. These can be made from shapes cut from white plastic (or some other material inedible to birds).

*Milk and water:* One part milk to two parts water. Spray regularly to deter mould.

*Pyrethrum:* This is an insecticide extracted from the flowers of *Chrysanthemum cinerariaefolium*, native to Dalmatia, but 90 per cent of world supply is produced in Kenya. Pyrethrum is a relatively non-toxic contact spray. It kills what it hits and is active for only a short time, so will need to be reapplied if the insects return. Spray in the evening, when bees have retired to bed, so as to avoid hitting a bee.

*Soapy water:* Use a gentle biodegradable liquid soap or soap flakes (normal clothes detergent is too harsh). Make a very weak solution and wash or spray it over the affected plant.

*Sodium bicarbonate:* Dissolve 2 teaspoons bicarb of soda in a litre of water. Add a few drops of detergent and vegetable oil to emulsify

and aid stickability. Spray on affected plants to treat powdery mildew.

*Sugar and borax:* Locate the ant nest. Place nearby a small container of one part borax to one part icing sugar, mixed with a little water to make a paste. Keep away from pets and children.

*White oil:* Oil spray suffocates scale and other soft-bodied insects. It can also prevent attack. Buy or make your own by mixing 500 mL of vegetable oil with 250 mL pure liquid soap. Use 1 tablespoon of this concentrate to 1 litre of water as a foliar spray.

## **EASE OF GROWING**

In part two, the relative ease of growing a plant is shown by the following scale.

**Easy** These plants are virtually indestructible. They are happy enough having you around the garden, but can do just as well on their own. Even better maybe.

**Fairly easy** Very hardy plants. These plants do need some supervision regarding watering, pruning and fertilising. Tend to be disease-and pest-resistant.

**Care needed** These plants will do well as long as their basic needs are understood and met.

**Fairly difficult** These plants require skill and experience to grow well. Regular fertilising, pruning and maintenance are needed.

**Difficult** The owners of these plants have a shedful of specialty secateurs, delight in breeding rare cultivars and ring up with advice on radio gardening shows.

## Making and taking your own medicine

Plants are mankind's oldest medicine. And they still work a treat. Originally, man would have simply picked the flowers, leaves or seeds from a plant and eaten them. Still not a bad method. Or he would have scrunched up a few leaves and applied them directly to a wound to staunch the bleeding. The most natural way to use plants is straight from the garden. However, plants have a short season and your need for their healing power may not coincide with their growing cycle, so a means of preserving is needed. Drying herbs, or making a tincture, ointment or infused oil are all means of preserving plants for medicinal use. The medicinal life of the herb can be extended by as much as three years by using these methods.

Methods to preserve and ways to administer plant medicine have not changed much over the centuries. In this chapter I'll show you how to make your own medicine from plants you have grown. However, if you have had a failed crop, or don't have the time to make your own medicine, but are keen to use medicine grown from the earth, there are other ways to achieve this. There is a wide range of organic Australian and New Zealand dried herbs available to purchase. Australia and New Zealand (especially New Zealand) are home to vibrant and passionate communities of herbalists, many of whom make their own medicines. Appendix 4 (page 270) has details on how to find these people and products. Additionally, there are some very fine proprietary products available in supermarkets, health-food shops and online.

### GATHERING

The leaf, flower, seed, bark and root of a plant are all used for medicine. Just what part is best for medicine has usually been

established through hundreds of years of practice by village herbalists, and has more recently been confirmed by scientific studies. In each plant entry in part two, the part of the plant best used for medicine is noted in the 'At a glance' table. In some cases, all parts of the plant will have the same therapeutic effect, so any or all can be used; in others, specific parts are used to treat specific conditions.

The rule of thumb is that plants should be gathered at the peak of their growth, which usually occurs around spring and summer. The best time is early morning, after any dew has evaporated. Discard any leaves or flowers that are damaged, choosing the freshest, greenest and most healthy-looking plants for medicine.

After you have cut your herbs, you can make your medicine immediately, or you may wish to dry them for future use.

### **When to gather**

<p><i>Leaves:</i> Young unblemished leaves picked before flowers open are the richest in medicinal properties.</p>
<p><i>Flowers:</i> Pick as soon as they open if you can get there in time.</p>
<p><i>Seeds:</i> Best if sun-ripened and gathered before they are dispersed by wind, eaten by birds or drop on the ground.</p>
<p><i>Bark:</i> Harvested early spring or late autumn. Take care to harvest only small pieces so as not to damage the plant.</p>
<p><i>Roots:</i> Harvest in autumn or when the aerial (above-ground) parts are dying off. Dig deep into the soil to lift the entire root without bruising. Brush and wash thoroughly, snipping fine rootlets off with scissors.</p>

---

## **DRYING**

The best time to cut plants for drying is just before they flower. Be sure to cut early in the morning, and if you want the plant to continue growing, some leaves should be left on the stems.

Plants can be dried in bunches, or left to hang upside down from a roof or shelf in a dry room. To protect hanging plants from the light and dust, cover them with perforated brown paper bags. The dried plant is ready when the leaves come off easily or are crisp.

Leaves, petals and roots can also be dried on a wire tray. A clean flywire screen makes an excellent tray. Place the wire tray where air can circulate above and below it and spread out the plant matter in a single layer. If necessary, trays can be stacked on top of one another. Turn the plant matter daily for about four days.

After the herbs are dried, put them in airtight containers. Glass is the best, but metal or food-grade plastic can be used. Store leaves whole or crushed. Crush the leaves in a coarse strainer, or with a mortar and pestle. Label and store glass jars out of direct sunlight to preserve colour and retain flavour.

Freezing plants is a good alternative to drying. Use only the healthiest leaves, as wilted leaves won't have the full flavour after freezing. Cut and clean the plant and put in plastic sandwich or freezer bags. Remember to identify the plant and date it. Once thawed, the plant matter can be used the same way as per the fresh plant for making medicine.

## **DOSAGE**

Any medicine, natural or not, can have side effects or affect a pre-existing condition. It is always wise to err on the side of too little than too much, and even wiser to consult a health practitioner who is trained in this area.

How much of a medicinal plant and how often to give it depend on the ailment. Small doses over a long period of time may suit a chronic condition like arthritis or eczema, whereas larger doses

given frequently may be more appropriate for an acute condition like a cold.

Herbal medicine has refined the art of dosage, which can be as important as the very herbs that are chosen. Understanding dosage is part of the training of any herbalist. Western herbalists rely on references such as the *British Herbal Pharmacopoeia* and German Commission E monographs for guidance.

Generally, herbal teas are to be taken three cups a day and tinctures from twelve drops to 5 mL one to three times daily, diluted in some water. Apply cream, compresses, poultices and baths as required.

## **TEA**

Tea is also known as a tisane or infusion, and preparing one is the simplest way to make a remedy. If you are new to the herbal tea game, you might be surprised at how good they taste, and you might choose to replace a coffee, a soft drink or an alcoholic drink with a cup of herbal tea. Or not.

### **Preparation**

- One teaspoon dried or 2 teaspoons of the fresh plant (chopped or ground) to 1 cup of boiling water.

### **Process**

To a teapot or coffee plunger, add plant material and boiling water. Allow to steep for five minutes or more. Honey can be added but not milk, as it may curdle.

No more needs to be done if using leaves or flowers, as they will release their therapeutic goodies easily enough. However, if your medicine is a seed, stem, root or bark, this will need to be lightly ground to increase the surface area. Use a mortar and pestle, or give it a couple of whizzes in a coffee grinder. Make tea fresh each time, or plan to use within 24 hours so it doesn't go off. Within that 24-hour period it can be reheated or drunk cold without a reduction in therapeutic quality.

## Other uses for tea

As well as drinking for health and enjoyment, any tea when cooled can also be made into a gargle, mouthwash, eyewash, footbath, hand bath, facial wash, bath and compress (see page 37). A decoction is a tea that has been simmered for 10 minutes or so. This method is recommended if the plant matter is extremely hard or woody, or if you want a stronger form of tea.

### TEA VS TISANES

Traditional tea is made only from the leaves of a bush called *Camellia sinensis*. 'Teas' can also be made from the flowers, leaves, seeds and roots of various herbs. For instance, chamomile tea is made from chamomile flowers, peppermint tea from peppermint leaves, fennel tea from fennel seeds and dandelion tea from dried dandelion root. However, as they are not made from leaves of the *Camellia sinensis* bush, technically they should not be called tea at all but herbal 'infusions' or, to use the French, 'tisanes' (pronounced tizz-ahns).

## TINCTURES

A tincture is a liquid, concentrated, alcohol-based herbal preparation commonly used by professional herbalists. Alcohol-based plant remedies have been used for centuries. The noted seventeenth-century herbalist Nicholas Culpeper frequently recommended herbs to be steeped in wine. Alcohol is a very efficient preserving agent, preventing bacterial and fungal spoiling. In this way the remedy can be kept for months to years. Additionally, alcohol is a good solvent. A solvent is a substance within which another substance can dissolve, in this case the therapeutic compounds in the plant. Tinctures can be made from fresh or dried plant material. The herbal literature and herbalists themselves traditionally use tinctures made from dried herbs. This is because dried herbs have, weight for weight, more therapeutic constituents than fresh herbs; they are also less likely to grow mould. An 'extract' is a more concentrated form of tincture, and

requires special equipment not easily applicable to a home environment.

Don't like drinking alcohol? The amount of alcohol in a dose of tincture (a dose is usually 5 mL) works out to be less than a sixth of a standard glass of wine or beer. This amount can be tolerated by most people. However, if the liver is severely compromised (for example, from cirrhosis), the person is a recovering alcoholic, or doesn't drink alcohol for religious reasons, teas, capsules or tablets may be taken instead. Or the tincture can be heated to boiling point to evaporate the alcohol.

### **Preparation**

- 1 part plant (fresh or dried) to 3 parts liquid (30 per cent high proof vodka and 70 per cent water), for example, for 100 g of plant matter you will need 300 mL of liquid, or for 500 g plant matter, 1.5 L liquid.

### **Process**

Place all liquid in a powerful blender. If you have a large amount, this is best done in smaller batches. Add plant matter gradually, breaking it up into small pieces so that the blender doesn't have to work too hard. If stalks and stems are too tough, discard them or you might risk breaking the blender. Pour into a sterilised jar with lid. Label it with the date and plant name, as all tinctures look the same. Leave in a cool, dark place for three months. Every few days throughout this time, check the tincture to make sure plant matter hasn't risen above the liquid. If it has, stir it in, and if necessary add some more liquid.

At the end of three months, all the precious compounds from the plant matter will have been dissolved into the liquid. Into a large jug, strain the liquid through two layers of butter muslin (available from a haberdashery), and squeeze thoroughly. Pour into a sterilised amber or dark glass bottle with lid, and label once again. The tincture should last two years. Keep in a dark, cool place.

## **CAPSULES**

Modern herbal medicine has embraced the use of capsules and tablets. They don't taste bad — a common complaint about tinctures and some teas. They are convenient: just place them in your bag or pocket and you can take them wherever you like. The machinery needed to make a tablet is usually beyond the humble home medicine-maker, however, capsules are simple to make, if a little fiddly.

### **Preparation**

- The plant material needs to be in a dry form and very finely ground into a powder. A coffee grinder is ideal for this. Purchase 00 size capsules from a pharmacy or the internet. A capsule-maker will hasten the filling process.

### **Process**

Clean your hands thoroughly and/or wear surgical gloves. Place the powdered plant in a shallow dish. Separate the halves of the capsule and move them together through the powder, filling them in the process, then push the halves together. Place in labelled jars.

## **TOPICAL MEDICINE**

Compresses, poultices, essential and infused oils, and creams are topical, or external, medicines. The skin is our largest organ, with plenty of surface area to absorb medicine. These topical applications can be used to treat a skin problem or wound, as well as treating the body beneath the skin. Some plants can cause a reaction on the skin, so it is best to dab some on your wrist or inner elbow for a few minutes as a test, before applying the whole mixture.

### **COMPRESS**

A compress is an excellent way to bring the healing plant to the site of the problem. It is a piece of material saturated with herbal teas, decoctions or diluted tinctures (dilution at 1 part tincture to 10 parts water).

Compresses are good for skin problems such as eczema or boils, or to relieve pain internally, e.g. period cramps, arthritis. **Preparation**

- Strips of soft cotton material, such as cut from a sheet or pillow case, or you can use butter muslin.
- The liquid can be a strong tea, a decoction or diluted tincture, warm or cool.
- Plastic wrap.
- Towel.

### **Process**

Dip one thick or two thin strips of material into the liquid. Squeeze off excess liquid. Apply to the area, covering as much of the affected part as possible. Wrap with plastic wrap. Cover with the towel to avoid dripping. Keep the compress on the affected part for between twenty and thirty minutes. Reapply as needed.

#### **A WORD ABOUT PLASTIC WRAP**

Plastics are an integral part of life in the twenty-first century, and very handy, particularly when using compresses and poultices, where the heat and liquid or plant material have to be kept in. However, there is some evidence that the breakdown products of plastic may not be fabulous for our health, and it is best to avoid drinking or eating directly from plastic containers, particularly when heated. When using plastic wrap with compresses or poultices, always ensure that there is a layer of material between your skin and the plastic.

### **POULTICES**

A poultice is similar to a compress, but instead of using a liquid, the plant material itself is used. It is often used warm, and can be used to draw out toxins, impurities and pus.

#### **Preparation**

- Herb (fresh or dried).
- Olive oil.

- Strips of soft cotton material, such as cut from a sheet or pillow case (you can also use butter muslin).
- Plastic wrap.
- Towel.

### **Process**

Chop or grind herb finely and simmer in a small amount of water until it thickens to a paste or jelly. Add some olive oil just before spreading onto the strip of material. Apply to the affected area, cover with plastic wrap and then with a towel.

### **ESSENTIAL OILS**

The use of essential oils to relax and heal goes back in time to ancient Greece, Egypt and Rome. All those glistening, well-oiled gladiators! While the term is *essential oil*, these oils are not oily like olive oil. Essential oils are highly concentrated oils extracted from aromatic plants. They are often added to base oils such as almond, jojoba or olive, as in the case of the Romans. The essential oils used in massage and cosmetic treatments, such as lavender, neroli and rose, are often selected for their beautiful scent. But the science of aromatherapy shows that various essential oils have medicinal properties. For instance, tea tree oil contains terpenes, which are antifungal and antiseptic for skin conditions like tinea. Lavender contains linalool, a mild sedative and antispasmodic.

Producing essential oils is not difficult, but requires making or buying a purpose-made still, and this is beyond the resources and interest of many home medicine-makers. However, the basic principles are as follows. In a metal container, plant material is placed on a grate (similar to a vegetable steamer), over boiling water. The container is then closed. As the water boils, vapour containing the essential oil is collected and cooled in a condenser. Most important is the next step, when a separator separates the essential oil from the water. The essential oil is then bottled and lasts around two years. Depending on the original plant, the leftover

hydrosol (cooled water) is used in cosmetics and food such as rose water and lavender water.

### **How to use it**

Add some to your bath, footbath or hand bath. Use in a steam vaporiser or essential oil burner. Can be added to creams.

#### **CAUTION**

Essential oils are very strong, and should be used sparingly — and you *never* take them internally. As little as 1 teaspoon of essential oil, if swallowed, could cause permanent liver damage. Although oil infusions are not as strong, they too should not be taken internally.

### **OIL INFUSION**

Oil infusions differ from essential oils in that all of the plant is used, not just its aromatic molecules. The whole plant is macerated, or steeped, in a carrier oil, so a variety of the herb's medicinal properties are imparted to the oil. Infused oils are less aromatic, but more complete in their plant profile. A few drops of essential oil can be added to infused oil to magnify a certain effect if necessary.

#### **Preparation**

- Fresh or dried herbs.
- Almond, olive or coconut oil.
- Airtight glass jar (sterilised).

#### **Process**

Immerse the fresh or dried herb in almond or other oil to a depth of 5–8 cm. Pour contents into an airtight glass jar. It's best to make up a quantity that will fill the jar so that there is as little air as possible above the oil. Leave in a warm, dark place to steep for six weeks.

To maintain your oil, check regularly to ensure that plant matter is completely immersed. If mould develops, there may be too much air between the oil and the top of the jar and/or the jar is in too

warm a place. Skim any mould off thoroughly, fill with more oil and move the jar to a cooler place if necessary.

After six weeks, strain into a jug through butter muslin. Pour into a bottle with a screwtop lid and store in the fridge. Infused oil can be added to creams and poultices.

## **CREAMS**

The easiest way to make a cream at home is to add either tinctures, infused oils and/or essential oils to a base cream.

### **Preparation**

- From a pharmacy or online buy a white vegetable-base moisturising cream. Ensure it is low allergen, with no added colour or fragrance. Can be based on beeswax, coconut butter, shea butter, glycerine or cold-pressed oils.
- Tincture, infused oil and/or essential oil.

### **Process**

*Tincture:* In a double boiler, simmer 100 mL of tincture to a concentrated 20 mL. Stir this into 100 g of cream, adding it gradually to achieve the right consistency — not too runny. To avoid contamination, try not to dip your fingers in the cream. Instead, use a small plastic or ceramic spatula.

*Infused Oil:* Add 20 mL to 100 g cream, following the directions for tincture.

*Essential Oil:* Add 10 drops per 100 g cream, following the directions for tincture.

## **PART TWO**

### **An A to Z of medicinal plants**

## Contents

Alfalfa  
Aloe vera  
Apple  
Astragalus  
Avocado  
Beetroot  
Bilberry/Blueberry  
Brahmi  
Broccoli  
Burdock  
Cabbage  
Calendula  
California poppy  
Chamomile (German)  
Chickweed  
Chilli  
Cinnamon  
Comfrey  
Damiana  
Dandelion  
Echinacea  
Eyebright  
Fennel  
Feverfew

Garlic  
Ginger  
Ginkgo  
Globe artichoke  
Gotu kola  
Grape  
Grapefruit  
Hibiscus  
Holy basil  
Honey  
Jerusalem artichoke  
Kava  
Lavender  
Lemon  
Lemon balm  
Lemon myrtle  
Licorice  
Meadowsweet  
Nasturtium  
Nettle  
Olive  
Onion  
Papaya  
Parsley  
Passionflower  
Peppermint  
Pomegranate  
Potato  
Raspberry

Rose

Rosemary

Sage

Shiitake mushroom

Spinach

St John

St Mary

Tea tree

Thyme

Tomato

Turmeric

Valerian

Yarrow

## Alfalfa

Bean sprouts are associated with the happy hippy days of the 1960s. This was a time of questioning of traditional values, including our diet. Bangers and mash were out; tofu and macrobiotics were in. Sprouts were embraced as nutritious, inexpensive and a food that could be grown by all, even on a window ledge in Brooklyn or Darlington. Half a century on, these ideals are popular again.

Alfalfa sprouts have a long history of being used for food and medicine. Alfalfa is a legume, a group of plants that includes the pulses or beans. Legumes have high nitrogen levels, which makes them highly prized nutritionally for animals as well as the soil. If left to grow beyond sproutdom, alfalfa becomes lucerne, a valued crop for feeding cattle and other livestock.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Fairly easy
Part used	Sprouts
Goes well with	For ulcerated conditions: meadowsweet or licorice
Also known as	<i>Medicago sativa</i> , lucerne, buffalo grass
How to use	Food, tea, green manure in the garden

	(lucerne)
Climate zones	1–6
Companion plants	No
Pot	Yes

## MEDICINAL USES

Like an egg, the seed of any plant contains all the nutrients necessary for the initial stages of growth for that plant. Something magical happens when a seed sprouts. At that moment (and for a while after) it contains gram for gram an enormous concentration of protein, chlorophyll, phytonutrients, vitamins, minerals, enzymes and hormones. In concert, these make sprouts a superfood.

Alfalfa sprouts contain an amino acid, L-canavanine, which is antiviral, antibacterial, antifungal and prevents tumour growth. They also contain isoflavone, a plant hormone, which helps reduce symptoms of menopause, including hot flushes, and may help protect against breast and prostate cancer. Alfalfa is useful in reducing cholesterol levels. Due to its alkaline nature and high level of enzymes, alfalfa improves digestion, including acid reflux, indigestion and bloating. As an alkalising food (see box, page 48) alfalfa is useful in guarding against osteoporosis, arthritis and cancers. Other legume sprouts such as mung beans, lentils and snowpeas are similarly nutritious and therapeutic.

## GOOD FOR

*Internally:* Adding nutrients to the diet, menopause, hot flushes, helps prevent breast and prostate cancer, high cholesterol, arthritis, low immunity, acid reflux, indigestion, bloating, osteoporosis.

## **ABOUT PH**

Our body likes to be in a state of steady balance (homeostasis). We prefer our blood pressure to be within a certain safe range, and the same goes for blood sugar levels, hormone levels, temperature and pH level. The pH level is a measure of acid/base (alkali). Different parts of the body have differing pH — for instance, blood needs to hover around a pH of 7.4 (slightly alkaline), whereas stomach acid should be a corrosive 2–3 in order to kill bacteria.

Although there has been little research so far in this interesting area, for decades natural health practitioners have recommended a diet that ‘alkalises’ the bloodstream. The premise is that many diseases, including cancer, osteoporosis, rheumatoid arthritis and gout, are in fact influenced considerably by the dietary acid–alkaline balance. For example, osteoporosis may be the result of a chronic intake of acid-forming foods consistently outweighing the intake of alkaline foods, leading to bones being constantly forced to give up their alkaline minerals (calcium and magnesium) in order to buffer the excess acid.

### ***Establishing pH balance***

To attain a proper pH balance, the dietary goal is quite simple: make sure that you have a higher intake of alkaline-forming foods than acid-forming foods. Basically, an alkaline diet is one rich in vegetables, fruit and legumes while avoiding over-consumption of grains, meat, dairy and some nuts. Confusingly, there is a difference between acidic foods and acid-forming foods. For example, while lemons and citrus fruit may *taste* acidic they actually have an alkalisating effect on the body. What determines the pH nature of the food in the body is the metabolic end products when it is digested (sometimes called ‘metabolic ash’). For example, the citric acid in citrus fruit is metabolised in the body to its alkaline form (citrate) and may even be converted to bicarbonate — also alkaline. I hope this is not too confusing; it’s important to remember that, like everything in life, it’s about balance. We need to eat some acid-forming foods too.

## **HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Add raw sprouts to salads, sandwiches and stir-fries.

Tea (see page 33).

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Growing alfalfa sprouts is fun, and makes a great project for children. You can buy purpose-made sprouting trays from health-food shops, or use the glass jar method. To a large clean glass jar, add one tablespoon of alfalfa seeds (preferably organic) and cover with lukewarm water. Place some muslin, kitchen wipe or flyscreen over the mouth of the jar and tie in place with string or a rubber band. Leave the seeds to soak overnight. In the morning, drain the water, rinse and place the jar mouth-side down on an angle so that excess water drains away. A warm spot like a window ledge is ideal. Rinse with fresh water three times a day to prevent mould from forming. Within a few days, the sprouts should measure about 1 cm long, and be bright green and crunchy. Eat and enjoy.

In the garden, lucerne makes a fine green manure crop (see page 11) in the season between other plantings.

## Aloe vera

**A**loe vera is known around the world as the ‘medicine plant’ or ‘first-aid plant’ due to the healing powers of the clear cooling gel found inside its spiky leaves.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Leaf
Goes well with	For internal and external healing: calendula or gotu kola
Also known as	<i>Aloe barbadensis</i> , medicine plant, first-aid plant
How to use	Gel topically, gel internally
Climate zones	1–6 (protect from frost)
Companion plants	No
Pot	Yes

## **MEDICINAL USES**

Two components of the aloe plant are used medicinally: the latex (or resin) and the gel. The latex is a yellow, extremely bitter sap found directly under the skin of the leaf. Aloe latex contains 30 per cent anthraquinones, which are natural chemicals irritating to the skin, and extremely laxative, causing griping pain and explosive diarrhoea. Aloe latex is still used as a laxative, but it is not recommended because it is so harsh on the bowel.

The aloe gel, obtained from the inner fleshy part of the leaf, is calming and cooling. It is popularly used for irritated, inflamed skin and mucous membranes. The gel is not only anti-inflammatory, but has a mild antibiotic and antifungal action. Applied topically, aloe gel has an instantly cooling and soothing effect, excellent for any kind of burn from sunburn and kitchen accidents to burns resulting from the cancer treatment radiotherapy. Drinking aloe gel can help treat ulcerations within the gastrointestinal tract from the mouth, throat and stomach to further down the intestinal tract.

A study showed that aloe vera gel applied to genital herpes sores displayed anti-inflammatory effects superior to cortisone cream. There is some evidence that drinking aloe juice helps to lower blood glucose levels, and may assist in the prevention and treatment of type 2 diabetes.

## **GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Mouth ulcers, oesophageal inflammation and ulceration, stomach ulcers, ulcerative colitis, diabetes.

*Topically:* After radiation therapy, burns, sunburn, kitchen burns, tinea, psoriasis, eczema, dry skin, skin ulcers, herpes lesions, wounds, abscesses, haemorrhoids (see below), anal fissures (see below).

*Caution:* Avoid aloe latex during pregnancy; the gel is fine.

## **HOW TO USE IT**

For all conditions, the gel is used. Cut an outside leaf close to the base of the plant. With a sharp knife or vegetable peeler remove the outer layer, taking care to remove all the yellow latex. Cut, mash or juice the gel and use within 24 hours. The gel can also be frozen for later use. It can be used internally, mixed with apple juice or as is, or can be applied to the skin.

To help heal haemorrhoids or anal fissure, cut the aloe into a 2-cm torpedo-shaped suppository and freeze in foil. Remove foil then insert frozen aloe suppository each night before bed until healed.

### **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Aloe vera is the perfect plant for the lazy gardener as it thrives on neglect, requiring virtually no care and very little water. A succulent, the aloe prefers a sunny, warm position in the garden or balcony, and makes a perfect pot plant. Probably due to its sultry North African origin, it is drought-, disease- and pest-resistant. The only thing that aloe plants don't tolerate is heavy frost. Propagation can be by seed, but it's much easier to remove offshoots (pups) from the outside of the plant. Leave them for a day to dry, then put in pot with one part sand, one part compost. Water well initially to establish. Plant elsewhere in your garden, or give to a friend in need. Really, the only downside to aloes is that they are a little prickly, but aren't we all sometimes?

## Apple

Apples were the fruit that tempted Eve, the falling object that gave Isaac Newton a good idea, what William Tell chose to place on his son's head as a bull's eye, and the gift of goodwill that Johnny Appleseed spread throughout Ohio. Stewed, cooked in a pie, or better still, eaten straight off the tree, apples are nature's comfort food.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Fairly difficult
Part used	Fruit
Goes well with	For general antioxidants: berries
Also known as	<i>Malus domestica</i>
How to use	Fruit: food; apple cider vinegar: drink or topical application
Climate zones	5, 6

Companion plants	Garlic, nasturtiums, clover
Pot	Dwarf varieties only

**MEDICINAL USES**

Apples provide an array of nutrients, especially antioxidants, most of which are concentrated in and under the peel. One particular antioxidant, quercetin, is an anti-inflammatory, good for inflammatory processes such as the microscopic blood vessel damage thought to precede atherosclerosis. Quercetin is also useful in reducing inflammation in the lungs, making apples a therapeutic food for asthmatics. Another antioxidant in apples is epicatechin, similar to the antioxidants in tea and red wine, and recommended for helping prevent a host of conditions from heart disease and diabetes to cancer.

Apples are a rich source of the soluble fibre pectin. Pectin regulates bowel transit time (the time it takes food to travel through the gastrointestinal tract), so it is good for both constipation and diarrhoea. Pectin is also a prebiotic, something that promotes the growth of beneficial microflora (good bugs) in our digestive systems, of which the average person has over 2 kg. Beneficial microflora improves all sorts of bowel conditions including irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), constipation, diarrhoea and inflammatory bowel disease. Pectin also assists our immune system, reduces allergies and plays an important role in general health. Additionally, pectin plays a role in controlling blood fats and reducing cholesterol. One of the most interesting features of pectin is that it can bind to and eliminate various toxic substances from the body, including lead and mercury.

**THE MOTHER OF ALL VINEGARS**  
 Apple cider vinegar is an old Vermont remedy. Its main claim to fame is as an arthritis remedy. Devotees also swear to its effectiveness for digestion,

energy and promoting longevity. The pH of apple cider vinegar is very similar to the healthy pH of skin and mucous membranes, making it ideal for skin tonics and douches (see page 56). Afficionados insist their apple cider vinegar contains the 'mother vinegar' or simply the 'mother'. The mother is the originating acetic bacteria that is added to alcohol to create vinegar. A little unsightly perhaps, but all in the name of good health.

## **GOOD FOR**

### **Apples**

*Internally:* Atherosclerosis, asthma, cancer protection, diarrhoea, constipation, heavy metal toxicity, reducing blood fats, cholesterol.

### **Apple cider vinegar**

*Internally:* Indigestion, reflux, poor digestion, bloating, protection against and treatment of arthritis. *Topically:* Skin conditions, thrush.

## **HOW TO USE IT**

### **Apples**

*Internally:* An apple a day keeps both the doctor and the naturopath away. Include apples as part of your regular diet. To obtain maximum nutritional benefit, eat the peel. For diarrhoea, grate a peeled apple, leave to turn brown, eat.

### **Apple cider vinegar**

*Internally:* The traditional way to imbibe is as a ritualistic early morning cuppa: to a cup of hot water, add 1 teaspoon of apple cider vinegar and 1 teaspoon of honey. Stir. This sets up you and your digestive system for the day. *Topically:* Skin toner (see box below); include in douche for thrush (see recipe below).

### **SKIN TONER**

It's all in the pH. A gentle toner for the face is a spritz of purified water and apple cider vinegar at a ratio of 8:1. This replicates skin's pH and is good for all skin types.

*Douche for thrush*

---

*30 mL apple cider vinegar (regulates the pH of the vagina)*

*2 cups warm calendula and/or echinacea tea (antifungal, anti-inflammatory)*

*5 drops tea tree oil (antifungal)*

*1 teaspoon or contents 3 capsules acidophilus powder (replaces good bugs)*

Put all the ingredients in a douche bag or clean plastic squeezey sauce bottle (reserve for this use!). Lie in bath with hips up, so that the mixture can sluice into the vagina. The mixture needs to coat the inside of the vaginal cavity to remove *Candida albicans*, create the right environment and seed beneficial microflora. Do this before your shower or bath for three days in a row. Repeat if necessary.

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Apple trees require a cool climate and vigilance as they can be prone to disease and pests. They can be grown from seed, however it will take several years before you see any fruit, so most people grow them from bare rootstock or buy grafted trees. With a graft, you can grow more than one variety of apple or even a pear, as they come from the same family. Apple trees can also be espaliered to maximise space or to feel as if you are in Versailles.

Prune in winter, when the tree is dormant. Fertilise around the root line with a nitrogen-rich fertiliser. Apples like to cluster in bunches of three or four on the branch. To achieve the ultimate apple, it's recommended to remove all but one fruit in a bunch. Keep grass away from the growing area under the apple tree as it will rob the soil of valuable nutrients.

## Astragalus

The Chinese say that astragalus strengthens *chi* (deep energy) — and who doesn't need a touch-up in the *chi* department from time to time? Astragalus is an adaptogenic herb (see box, page 151) excellent for treating the effects of stress on the body, from whatever cause, be it an infection, emotional trauma, back pain or environmental stresses including shiftwork or jetlag.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Care needed
Part used	Root
Goes well with	For boosting immunity: andrographus, echinacea or withania
Also known as	<i>Astragalus membranaceus</i> , <i>A. propinquus</i> , milk vetch, <i>huang qi</i>
How to use	Tea, tincture, capsule
Climate zones	5, 6
Companion	No

plants	
Pot	Yes

**MEDICINAL USES**

Astragalus does its best work when boosting a vulnerable immune system and treating long-term or chronic infections, for example, sinusitis, thrush and gingivitis. Although not as dramatic as an acute infection, like a raging bout of flu, chronic infections wear us down, causing fatigue and vague symptoms of debility as well as setting the body up for further infections, and even heart disease and cancer. Astragalus is well suited to that long-term debilitating condition known as chronic fatigue syndrome. It is vital to treat the immune system with respect and to try to eliminate even small, seemingly inconsequential infections. Astragalus is brilliant for this as it stimulates the immune system via natural killer cells and white blood cells. Herbalists, when treating a chronic infection, would include astragalus in the remedy to boost general immunity as well as herbs specific for the part of the body affected. (For example, if treating chronic sinusitis, herbs such as eyebright and echinacea would be added.)

Astragalus is wonderful for convalescence after illness or a time of great stress. Adaptogenic herbs are used to increase stamina and endurance.

In Traditional Chinese Medicine astragalus is also recommended as a heart tonic. Recent studies back this up, showing astragalus seems to be effective against angina.

**NATURE’S TONIC**  
 Convalescing is a term that is sadly out of fashion. Nowadays it is expected that one returns to work and active life as soon as the immediate ‘emergency’ is passed, be it an accident, surgery, childbirth or influenza. The body prefers to heal in its own time, although this may not fit in neatly with work deadlines and other plans. To be true to your body, take time after illness,

surgery or other trauma to convalesce and also take nature's convalescing tonics: astragalus, Siberian ginseng, withania and licorice.

## **GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Helping to prevent colds and flu, fatigue, chronic infections (sinusitis, thrush, etc.), chronic fatigue syndrome, as an adjunct to cancer treatments (surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy), post-cancer treatment, convalescing after illness, after surgery, after childbirth, anaemia, leukopenia, angina, athletes wanting to increase stamina and endurance.

## **HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Tea, tincture, capsule (see pages 33–36).

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Native to Mongolia and northern China, astragalus, a small, slow-growing shrub, requires a sandy, well-drained soil in full sun. The outer layer of the astragalus seed needs to be gently crushed or scratched (scarified) before planting. It prefers an alkaline soil, so add dolomite if necessary. The root reaches its full medicinal value after four or five years, which makes growing astragalus a long-term proposition. Unless you have the time and enough room to devote to this project, it is probably easier to buy astragalus root from a herbal supplier.

## Avocado

Avocados were a mainstay of the Aztec and Inca diets. Amidst their conquering and plundering, the Conquistadors employed an historian, Fernandez de Oriedo, who, in 1519, gave an excellent description of this hitherto unreported plant: ‘In the centre of the fruit is a seed like a peeled chestnut. And between this and the rind is the part which is eaten, which is abundant, and is a paste similar to butter and of a very good taste.’ The wider world has been enjoying avocados ever since.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Care needed
Part used	Flesh of fruit
Goes well with	Tomatoes and smoked salmon on toast
<i>Also known as</i>	<i>Persea americana</i>
How to use	Food or applied on skin
Climate zones	1–5
Companion plant	Comfrey
Pot	No

### MEDICINAL USES

Unique among fruit, avocado stores energy as fat. The type of fat is monounsaturated, similar to olive oil, and helpful in the prevention and treatment of heart disease. Eating avocado regularly will help reduce total cholesterol, while increasing good cholesterol (HDL) ratios. There is also evidence that eating avocado will reduce and prevent further degeneration of the cartilage in osteoarthritis. Avocados also contain good amounts of soluble fibre, vitamin E, betacarotene and the natural pigment lutein, a substance that helps reduce the formation of cataracts and age-related macular degeneration. As it is rich in skin-friendly vitamin E and monounsaturated fats, avocados help all kinds of skin problems, from eczema and psoriasis to dry skin.

### **GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Managing and preventing high cholesterol, arthritis, eczema, psoriasis, cataracts, macular degeneration, dry skin.

*Topically:* Eczema, psoriasis, dry skin.

### **HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Use in salads, sandwiches, dips (see guacamole recipe below).

*Topically:* Poultice or mask (see recipe below).

## ***Avocado mask for skin conditions***

---

*2 tablespoons ground rolled oats (finely mill in coffee grinder)*

*½ avocado, mashed*

*¼ cup honey*

To clean, dry skin, apply mixture of oats, avocado and honey. Wait 10 minutes, then rinse.

## ***Guacamole***

---

*1 avocado, flesh removed*

*Juice ½ lemon*

*2 cloves garlic, crushed*

*Cracked black pepper, pinch sea salt*

*Mash all ingredients together with a fork. Eat on toast with sliced tomato or as an accompaniment to grilled fish, chicken or lamb.*

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Testicle trees: that's what the Aztecs called avocado trees. Part of the laurel family, the avocado is a large evergreen tree that grows up to 9 m. They maintain a magnificent shape that does not require pruning. Avocados hang down from branches in pairs, no doubt giving the visual clue to their early Aztec name. There are more than seventy varieties of avocados, with the most common being the smooth-skinned, green and voluptuously pear-shaped Fuerte; and the smaller, knobbly, purple-black Hass. In its prime the avocado tree can bear 400 fruit per year. It's best to buy grafted plants as seedlings often disappoint by not producing fruit. Grafted plants begin to bear fruit after four years.

Avocado trees, at least initially, need protection from frosts and wind. They require deep, very well-drained soil and need frequent watering. Good drainage is the key: they risk death if their feet are wet for more than forty-eight hours. Fertilise when flowering commences in spring, then twice during summer and once again in autumn. Avocado fruit will mature but not ripen on the tree. This is due to a hormone produced by the leaves that inhibits the production of ethylene, the ripening chemical. Once picked, the fruit will ripen within days. Pick when fully formed.

## Beetroot

Americans call them ‘beets’; Aussies add the ‘root’. Twenty years ago in Australia, beetroot was only to be bought in tins, sliced, and swimming in vinegar and sugar. Likely sightings were beside the potato salad or pressed between a slice of tinned pineapple and fried onion in a hamburger. Nowadays, dusty-looking fresh beetroots are proudly taking their place alongside other vegetables in your local fruit shop, supermarket and, most importantly, your garden.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Fairly easy
Part used	Root, leaf (either or both)
Goes well with	In juice: carrot, celery, parsley or apple
Also known as	<i>Beta vulgaris</i> , beet
How to use	As food or in juice; can buy tablets with concentrated antioxidants
Climate zones	1–6

Companion plants	Beans, cabbages, cauliflower, lettuces, onions
Pot	No

## **MEDICINAL USES**

### **Root**

The root of the beetroot is a rich source of nutrients, including antioxidants, magnesium, fibre and especially folic acid. Folic acid, or vitamin B9, is recommended for women planning to conceive, as it helps reduce the risk of the baby being born with spina bifida, a condition in which the spinal cord does not close completely. Folic acid is considered an essential nutrient as it is integral to the growth and development of every cell in the body, which is why it is important for everyone, not just mums-to-be. The unique red-violet colour of beetroot comes from the phytonutrient betacyanin. This pigment is found in only a few plants. Preliminary research suggests that betacyanin may prevent cancer.

Max Bircher-Benner (1867–1939) was a health guru who promoted a raw food diet as the key to good health and the prevention of conditions such as arthritis and cancer. He was also big on the healing powers of fresh vegetable and fruit juices. People who adopt these principles notice an increase in energy and vitality. Beetroot is well known for its effect on improving the function of the liver, a major organ of detoxification. Improving liver function is sometimes referred to as ‘liver cleansing’. Drinking beetroot juice straight can be too strong for delicate livers, leaving some folk feeling queasy, so to minimise this, ensure beetroot comprises no more than one-quarter of the juicing ingredients.

### **Leaf**

Beetroot leaves are very high in magnesium and chlorophyll and make an excellent addition to the diet, or included in juices.

## **A SWEET, COLOURFUL ROOT**

Beetroot contains a relatively high amount of sugar and it is closely related to the creamy-coloured sugar beet, which is the major source of sugar in Europe, Russia and the United States. Although beetroot does contain sugar, it has a medium glycaemic index rating (see box, page 158). Don't be alarmed if you notice your urine turning pink, or your poo red after consuming beetroot. It is merely the betacyanin pigment and nothing to be alarmed about.

## **GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* General wellbeing, detoxing, poor liver function, cancer protection, nausea, fatigue, high cholesterol, weight loss, preconception.

*Caution:* Beetroot leaves contain high levels of oxalic acid. Oxalic acid can be a trigger if you are at risk of kidney stones.

## **HOW TO USE IT**

### **Root**

*Internally:* Raw (grated into salads or juiced), cooked (baked or steamed, in soup).

### **Leaf**

*Internally:* Raw baby leaves are tasty in salads, and the older ones can be added to juices or cooked in stocks, soups or casseroles.

## ***Detox juice***

---

*3 carrots ½ beetroot*

*Handful baby beetroot leaves*

*½ bunch parsley*

*1 cm root ginger*

*(NB all vegetables are raw)*

Juice all ingredients together.

## ***Borscht***

---

A traditional Ukrainian soup, borscht is a delicious way to enjoy the healthy benefits of beetroot. Borscht can be eaten hot or cold, and is best served with a dollop of full-cream yoghurt.

*4 large beetroots*

*1 tablespoon olive oil*

*2 medium brown onions, finely chopped 2 sticks celery, finely chopped*

*Juice of 1 lemon*

*Freshly cracked black pepper, sea salt*

*1 L chicken stock (or water)*

*Plain yoghurt to serve*

Place whole beetroots in baking tray, drizzle over with olive oil. Bake in 160°C oven for 1 hour or until soft. Remove. Cool and peel off skin and top. Chop into pieces. Sauté chopped onions and celery until golden. Cool. In a blender add beetroot, celery, onions, lemon juice, salt and pepper. Whiz for a few seconds, until coarsely ground. Return to saucepan, add stock, and heat.

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

There are many varieties, shapes and sizes of beetroot, all delicious, all good for you. Unlike other vegetables, which become less sweet as they grow, beetroots remain sweet and delicious however large they become. Before sowing, rinse the seeds thoroughly with cold water in a sieve; this helps germination. For ongoing beetroot, plant a few seeds or seedlings every second week. (Seedlings are available, but they don't transplant well and you are better off growing from seed.) They prefer full sun and well-drained soil. Beetroots can go a bit woody if the soil is allowed to dry out. Don't overfeed or they will be tasteless. The upper third of the beetroot

often grows above the surface of the soil; cover it well with mulch. Beetroots don't fare well with competition from weeds, another reason to mulch. Use scissors when harvesting the young leaves for cooking or juicing, as pulling the leaves may dislodge the root.

## Bilberry/Blueberry

It is said that the RAF fighter pilots who preferred bilberry jam on their scones during the Second World War were blessed with improved vision on their night-time forays. Tall tale or not, bilberries are indeed good for eyesight. Although the main studies into vision have been focused on bilberries, their second cousin (once removed) blueberries (*Vaccinium corymbosum*, *V. augustifolium*) contain similar antioxidants which theoretically should have the same medicinal effect. Blueberries are also easier to grow in Australia's climate.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow (blueberries)	Care needed
Part used	Berry, leaf
Goes well with	For eyes: eyebright; for blood vessel strengthening: gotu kola
Also known as	<i>Bilberry: Vaccinium myrtillus, whortleberry</i> <i>Blueberry: Vaccinium corymbosum, V. augustifolium</i>
How to use	Tea, tincture, capsule, jam

Climate zones	6 and cooler parts of 5
Companion plants	No
Pot	Yes

**MEDICINAL USES**

The almost blue-black colour of bilberries and blueberries is due to a range of anthocyanins, powerful antioxidants with a particular influence on arteries, veins and especially the small blood vessels called capillaries. By strengthening and repairing capillaries, the anthocyanins are helpful in a variety of conditions, including helping in preventing and treating the side effects of diabetes such as retinopathy and male impotence. Additionally, they help prevent strokes and atherosclerosis.

**GOOD FOR**

**Berry**

*Internally:* Vision disorders including glaucoma, myopia, retinitis; eye and circulation problems caused by diabetes; nosebleeds caused by fragile blood vessels; easy bruising; haemorrhoids; varicose veins; Raynaud’s syndrome.

**Leaf**

*Internally:* The leaves are useful for controlling diarrhoea.

**HOW TO USE IT**

**Berry**

*Internally:* Eat berries fresh or use in cooking. Both bilberry and blueberry jams are delicious, and full of all the goodness of the

berries, although, as jam contains a fair amount of Satan's crystals (sugar), enjoy, but use in moderation.

Tea (see page 33).

### **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Bilberries are difficult to grow in Australia as they prefer a colder Northern European climate. Blueberries, however, do very nicely here, although they are also fond of cooler weather. Have patience, as the fruit is only produced in the third year, but will continue for up to twenty years. Blueberries prefer an acidic soil, and do well with minimal fertilising with chicken manure. They have a fragile root system that needs to be kept moist, and prefer a sheltered position. Remember to cover with netting to prevent your crop being eaten by birds.

## Brahmi

Tradition has it that the holy sages of ancient India, the Rishi, were entrusted to pass on their vast knowledge of the Vedic scriptures from generation to generation by memorising epic poems. These poems took days, even weeks, to recite. To aid the Rishis in this extraordinary task of concentration and memory, they drank cups of a special herbal tea. A herb that grew abundantly alongside the sacred River Ganges. That herb was brahmi.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Leaf, stem, flower (any or all)
Goes well with	For memory: gotu kola or ginkgo
<i>Also known as</i>	<i>Bacopa monnieri</i>
How to use	Food, tea, tincture, capsule
Climate zones	1–6 (drought and frost tender)
Companion plants	No
Pot	Yes

### MEDICINAL USES

Brahmi improves and sustains concentration levels. It is also good for improving learning, memory and the acquisition and retention of information. Brahmi acts as a generalised tonic on the nervous system, including improving sleep and mood, and is extremely effective at reducing the debilitating symptoms of anxiety.

Brahmi also helps regenerate damaged nerves, making it a particularly good herb for recovering from a stroke, as well as peripheral neuropathy, Bell's palsy and other conditions affecting the nerves. A study showed that brahmi reversed memory loss in aged rats (... where did I leave my cheese?), so it may have a future use as a treatment in dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

### **GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Poor concentration and memory, post-stroke, Bell's palsy, peripheral neuropathy, insomnia, nervous breakdown, anxiety, improving mental performance, epilepsy, possibly protecting against dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

### **HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Brahmi has a pleasantly bitter taste and can be enjoyed fresh in salads, added fresh to juices, or cooked as a vegetable, or added to soups and stews. The traditional Indian method of use is to juice the plant and mix with ghee (clarified butter) or coconut oil.

Tea, tincture, capsule (see pages 33–36).

### **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Brahmi is an aquatic or semi-aquatic spreading perennial, with light-green, succulent leaves. Frequently found in swamps and along rivers in Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, China, Taiwan and Vietnam, as well as some southern states of the USA, brahmi is easy to grow and maintain in fish ponds and garden water features. The pretty bell-shaped flowers are white with a tinge of blue or pink and attract the attention of bees and butterflies. Brahmi is also a popular aquarium plant.

## Broccoli

Broccoli-mania swept the world in the early 1990s after a study published by Paul Talalay from the Johns Hopkins Hospital showed that people who regularly ate broccoli significantly reduced their risk of developing cancer, particularly breast and prostate cancer.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Fairly easy
Part used	Flowering head
Goes well with	For detox: beetroot or dandelion root
Also known as	<i>Brassica oleracea italica</i>
How to use	Food
Climate zones	1-6
Companion plants	Sage, chamomile, beetroot, peppermint, celery, onions, nasturtiums

Pot	Yes
-----	-----

### **MEDICINAL USES**

The sharp, almost mustardy, taste and sulphurous smell of broccoli is due to a group of naturally occurring compounds called glucosinolates, specifically isothiocyanates and indoles. These smelly compounds work in various ways in the body. One is by helping the liver to detoxify and eliminate cancer-forming substances (carcinogens), another is to protect DNA and cell walls from carcinogenic damage. Glucosinolates are common throughout the brassica group, which also includes cabbage, cauliflower, turnip, brussels sprouts and gai lan.

Sulforaphane, also a cancer-inhibiting substance found in broccoli, has been found to stop the growth of the bacteria *Helicobacter pylori*, responsible for gastritis and stomach ulcers. Broccoli has a very low GI, making it an excellent vegetable for controlling and preventing diabetes.

### **GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Guards against cancer, macular degeneration, cataracts, gastritis and stomach ulcers, diabetic diet.

### **HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Use steamed, stir-fried or raw in salads.

### **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Broccoli, Italian for ‘little arms’, is named for the branching shape of the stems that reach dense heads. These are actually a mass of flowers that are harvested while still in bud. Broccoli enjoys rich, composted soil, and will grow larger heads if given liquid fertiliser every couple of weeks. It doesn’t cope well when deprived of water, becoming bitter-tasting and more likely to bolt. Broccoli does well in most climates, but prefers cooler weather and is best planted in

late summer or early autumn. Stagger planting to ensure a regular supply.

After the large main head has been harvested, diligent fertilising will produce smaller yet very tasty shoots for some time afterwards. Pick when the head is a blue to purple in colour, well before any yellow flowers appear. Broccoli is prone to pests, including aphids, caterpillars and cabbage white butterfly. (See pages 23–25 for tips on the natural control of pests.)

## Burdock

**B**urdock is related to the prickly thistle, and its flowers are encased in a whorl of hooked tips which stick to anything and everything, hence the 'bur' in burdock, and purportedly the inspiration for Velcro. Sheep are particularly prone to catching the burs in their wool, and it is this clever survival technique that enables burdocks to be widely dispersed. Burdock leaves and roots are enjoyed as vegetables in Japan and Europe. Called *gobo* in Japan, the young burdock root is julienned and used frequently in macrobiotic cuisine.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Root
Goes well with	For skin conditions: Nettles, calendula or cleavers
<i>Also known as</i>	<i>Arctium lappa, gobo</i>
How to use	Food, tea, tincture, capsule, compress, poultice
Climate zones	1-6

Companion plants	No
Pot	No

**MEDICINAL USES**

Burdock root has been used for centuries as a blood purifier, depurative or detoxifier. These are all terms to describe the action of a plant to cleanse the body from within via the organs of elimination, which include the liver, kidneys, bowel, lungs and the skin. Burdock has a particular affinity with the liver, our busiest detoxifying organ. Other herbal blood purifiers include yellow dock, nettles, cleavers and echinacea. Natural therapists believe that conditions affecting the skin often reflect disharmony within. Hence, burdock root is often recommended as a remedy for skin conditions such as eczema, psoriasis and acne. These conditions are usually longstanding, often with genetic predisposition, and need months (rather than weeks) of persistent treatment. Burdock is reputed to have cured Henry III of syphilis, a particularly nasty venereal disease thankfully not so common nowadays. Burdock is mildly laxative.

**GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Eczema, acne, psoriasis, boils, gout, arthritis, psoriatic arthritis, constipation, a detox aid.

*Topically:* Eczema, psoriasis, boils.

**HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Use the root in stir-fries or as a vegetable. Also, tea, tincture, capsule (see pages 33–36).

*Topically:* Compress or poultice (see pages 37–38) for boils and skin conditions, including eczema and psoriasis.

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Burdock grows in moist soils, but prefers the moist side of well drained. The dull greeny-grey leaves are large — up to 30 cm long — and covered with a mass of fine down. The roots can grow as long as 45 cm and as thick as an arm, and they are back-breaking to dig up. For this reason seasoned burdock growers suggest planting seed very close together to ensure the root grows long and narrow. Due to their long root length, burdocks don't do well in pots and are better suited to paddocks and less valuable parts of the garden. Burdock roots are best harvested in autumn. Dry before using as medicine, or use fresh in food. Deadhead the flowers before they go to seed, otherwise burdock will take over.

## Cabbage

Cabbages have long been associated with a rustic lifestyle and good health. Pliny the Elder was a great fan, recommending cabbage for a host of ills. A French custom was to bring newlyweds cabbage soup first thing in the morning after their bridal night. *Trés* romantic.

The deep purple colour of red cabbage remains when used raw grated in salad, but will tend to go a disappointing grey when cooked, unless combined with natural acid from fruit or vinegar, which explains why recipes involving red cabbage often include apples, vinegar or wine.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Fairly easy
Part used	Leaf
Goes well with	For detox: beetroot or dandelion root; for ulceration: calendula
Also known as	<i>Brassica oleracea capitata</i>
How to use	Food, topically
Climate	1-6

zones	
Companion plants	Mint, rosemary, thyme, sage, oregano, calendula, chamomile, nasturtiums, peas, beans, celery, beetroot; dislikes strawberries and tomatoes
Pot	Yes

**MEDICINAL USES**

Cabbage is part of the brassica group, which includes broccoli and brussels sprouts, plants that contain sulphurous-smelling compounds called glucosinolates. Glucosinolates have significant anticancer properties, as well as protecting the liver from damage and improving its ability to eliminate toxic substances and excess hormones.

Cabbage is a good source of B vitamins and vitamin C (see box below). Red cabbage contains anthocyanin pigments (the same antioxidants as in red wine), known for helping to guard against heart disease. Raw cabbage juice heals ulcerations of the digestive tract, especially stomach ulcers.

**SAUERKRAUT AND SCURVY**

In addition to lemon juice and rum, Captain James Cook carried vats of sauerkraut to stave off scurvy. Sailors, cramped quarters and sauerkraut: a potent combination. Traditionally, sauerkraut is made by adding beneficial bacteria (*lactobacillus*) to shredded cabbage, salt and water. The bacteria use the natural sugar in the cabbage to form lactic acid and acetic acid (vinegar), which preserve the vegetable and its vitamin C (the anti-scurvy vitamin).

**GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Cancer protection, stomach and intestinal ulceration, detoxing, restoring and promoting liver health.

*Topically:* Mastitis.

### **Sauerkraut**

As above, plus improving microflora of bowel, inflammatory bowel diseases, constipation.

*Caution:* Cabbages contain goitrogens, compounds that may lower thyroid function. This will only occur if large quantities of raw cabbage (or other brassicas) are eaten (more than four servings a day). Goitrogens are inactivated by heat, so cooked cabbage is fine.

### **HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Cabbage can be added to stews and casseroles, or steamed, stir-fried, eaten raw in coleslaw or preserved as sauerkraut. Use the juice for treating stomach ulcers; raw juice is best. Mix half and half with carrot juice. *Topically:* The cabbage leaf cure is a show-stopping and surprisingly effective symptom relief for inflamed breasts (mastitis). Chill a whole cabbage. Take a D-cup size leaf and discard the hard rib; cut a hole for the nipple. Place the leaf inside your bra, over the breast, until it reaches body temperature; repeat several times daily.

### **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Cabbages are available in several shapes and sizes, including dwarf varieties — just the right size for one meal. Like most vegetables, cabbages do best with full sun. Cabbages are very hardy, and once established can withstand frost. Sow some seeds every three weeks in late summer and early autumn, so you'll have plenty for the family. Cabbages prefer a richly composted, free-draining soil. Feed every two weeks with a liquid fertiliser. Growing sage, rosemary, thyme and chamomile near cabbage will dissuade the pernicious cabbage white butterfly from having a chew or three and laying its eggs. Each morning, hunt for the sneaky light green caterpillars on the underside of the leaves, and manually remove. Cabbages prefer

an alkaline soil. Add some dolomite and a handful of wood ash if your soil is acidic. A terrific mulch around cabbage plants is composted horse or cow manure. Don't grow cabbages in the same place next year as they will be susceptible to clubroot.

## Calendula

Calendula is enjoyed by gardeners for its chirpy yellow and orange flowers, and the fact that it guards against pests in companion planting. In India, calendula is revered, and garlands of its saffron-coloured flowers are draped over statues of beloved gods and goddesses. The dried yellow petals of calendula can be used as a dye, and are sometimes used as a cheap substitute for saffron in cooking. However, it is for calendula's brilliant antiseptic and healing powers that herbalists love and use this plant.

Calendula is sometimes referred to as pot marigold, which is confusing as marigolds are a different plant altogether, although they both have pretty yellow flowers. *Calendula officinalis* is the species that has the therapeutic benefits.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Flower
Goes well with	For wound healing: echinacea, chickweed, aloe vera or gotu kola
Also known as	<i>Calendula officinalis</i> , pot marigold, English marigold
How to use	Food, tea, tincture, capsule, cream, poultice,

	compress, infused oil
Climate zones	1-6
Companion plants	Everyone loves calendula
Pot	Yes

## MEDICINAL USES

Calendula is used internally and externally as an antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory. It has been used for centuries to heal wounds, boils, burns, abscesses, cuts and scrapes. It is used extensively in the cosmetic industry as a healing agent.

Calendula is most effective in the upper gastrointestinal tract, particularly the mouth and throat. It also treats inflamed gums (after dental extractions), mouth ulcers and sore throats, and can be used as a preventative and treatment for gastritis and stomach ulcers. It is also useful for improving lymphatic action, and this, combined with its antibacterial powers, makes it ideal for combating infections involving inflamed lymph nodes such as tonsillitis and cystic acne. Use both internally as a tea, tincture or capsule and externally as a cream, compress, poultice or facial wash. Calendula cream is excellent for healing the cracked nipples of nursing mothers as well as on baby's nappy rash.

## GOOD FOR

*Internally:* Sore throats, tonsillitis, pharyngitis, glandular fever, boils, inflamed lymph nodes, stomach and duodenal ulcers, acne.

*Topically:* Ulcers (e.g. mouth ulcers, leg ulcers), wounds, cuts, burns, acne, thrush, conjunctivitis, nappy rash, radiation dermatitis, bed

sores, cracked nipples.

## HOW TO USE IT

*Internally:* Add calendula petals to salads and sandwiches for colour and therapy. Tea, tincture, capsule (see pages 33–36). Throat infections: gargle a strong tea or dilute tincture. *Topically:* For skin problems including wounds, use the infused oil, or apply a compress, poultice or cream (see pages 37–41). You can also use the tea as a facial wash (see page 33).

## *Calendula cream*

---

*2 parts cocoa butter\**

*2 parts shea butter\**

*2 parts calendula oil infusion or tincture*

*\*Can be replaced by white vegetable-based cream from the pharmacist.*

*Heat butters over low heat. Remove and add the oil or the tincture. Ladle mixture into clean jars, wipe rims of jars as needed, and allow to cool. Add label with ingredients and date prepared. Store in cool, dark place. Lasts six to twelve months. For better storage life, keep in refrigerator.*

## GROWING YOUR OWN

The name ‘calendula’ has its origins in *calendae*, Latin for the first day of the month, as calendulas can flower every month of the year. The flowers range in colour from cream to dark orange. Requiring little attention, the calendula’s only requirements are lots of sunshine and well-drained soil. Calendulas make a nice grouped display in a pot. Once you have a crop you will find you rarely need to buy more seeds as they vigorously self-seed. Calendulas only open their flowers during the day; folklore has it that if the flowers open before 7.00 a.m. you can be sure of fine weather. Deadhead frequently to encourage further flowering, but leave a few flowers to encourage self-seeding.

## California poppy

**Y**es, this plant is related to the opium poppy and, no, it is not addictive.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Flower, stem, leaf (any or all)
Goes well with	For sleep: valerian, passionflower or zizyphus
<i>Also known as</i>	<i>Eschscholzia californica</i>
How to use	Tea, tincture, capsule
Climate zones	1–6
Companion plants	Vegetables; California poppies attract beneficial insects
Pot	Yes

## MEDICINAL USES

California poppy's actions are primarily as a sedative and painkiller. It is thought to act via GABA (see box, page 87). Studies have shown significant positive results on the Hamilton Anxiety Scale

—used by psychiatrists and psychologists to gauge a person's level of anxiety—when patients used California poppy. Although it is a sedative, people using this herb remain alert yet calm. California poppy is good medicine for pain, anxiety and insomnia

—particularly if all three are involved, which is often the case. There is some evidence that California poppy can reduce the amount of adrenaline (the 'flight or fight' hormone) produced while potentiating the action of more calming hormones. California poppy is excellent at correcting chronic disrupted sleeping patterns. It's good for those who suffer from long-term insomnia, whether getting to sleep or staying asleep, rather than a bad night every now and then. Best results are from taking California poppy regularly over a period of weeks.

## GOOD FOR

*Internally:* Anxiety, fear, insomnia, headaches and migraine, stress, period pain, chronic pain from any cause; guards against irritable bowel syndrome.

## HOW TO USE IT

*Internally:* Tea, tincture, capsule (see pages 33–36).

### ALL ABOUT GABA

GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid) is a naturally occurring chemical messenger that is widely distributed in the brain. Researchers believe that GABA reduces fear and anxiety by binding to particular neurons. When these neurons are excited, we experience the stressful emotions of fear and anxiety, so a substance that will bind and inactivate the firing of these neurons will minimise these stressful emotions. This is precisely what the benzodiazepine

medications (Valium, Librium) do. However, these medications are addictive, and California poppy is not.

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

California poppy is the state flower of California and, as the climate of California and much of Australia is similar, not surprisingly it grows very nicely in an Antipodean context. It requires full sun and is drought-tolerant. The traditional California poppy has lovely orange flowers with fine grey-green foliage, however, colours can range from cream to deep purple. The flowers close at night, opening again at dawn. California poppy grows best from seed and dislikes being uprooted, often curling up its toes when transplanted. It grows so easily, and self-seeds so readily, that it has the potential to be a weed, so keep it confined.

## Chamomile (German)

Chamomile tea is the very brew that Peter Rabbit's mother gave him for a bellyache. Good for bunnies, good for you. Roman chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*) is another species of the same family. It has similar physical and therapeutic properties to the German species.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Fairly easy
Part used	Flower
Goes well with	For digestion: peppermint or ginger
Also known as	<i>Matricaria recutita</i> , <i>chamomile</i>
How to use	Tea, tincture, capsule, compress, poultice, bath, enema
Climate zones	2–6 (cooler parts of zone 1)
Companion	Most plants, mint, cabbages

plants	
Pot	Yes

### **MEDICINAL USES**

A gentle herb, chamomile works its magic on several levels. In particular it has a calming effect on the mind. Chamomile was recommended in the seventeenth century to ‘comforte the brain’. Research has validated the use of chamomile for uplifting mood, and as a mild but effective sedative, safe even for babies.

In addition to its comforting role for the mind, chamomile is well loved for its calming effect on the digestion. In Europe, chamomile tea is commonly sipped as a digestive aid after meals. It has much to offer the ailing digestive system as it is an effective antispasmodic, helping to relieve cramping, flatulence and bloating. Evidence suggest that it is effective for irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), as well as being useful in the prevention and treatment of stomach ulcers. Weak, cooled chamomile tea helps to relieve the discomfort and distress of babies’ colic, as well as teething.

Chamomile is also good for the skin and mucous membranes, where it acts as an an anti-inflammatory. Bisabolol and chamazulene are the essential oils derived from chamomile; chamazulene is a surprising blue colour. Both are soothing and healing to skin, which is why they are often chosen to be an ingredient in expensive cosmetics. Chamomile is also wonderful in baths to soothe dry, red and itchy skin. A compress or bath is helpful for measles, chickenpox, eczema, shingles, nappy rash and sunburn. Chamomile tea is famous as a hair rinse for blondes, even bottle blondes.

For lower bowel ulceration and irritable bowel syndrome, a chamomile enema may help. Use lukewarm chamomile tea for this. You can purchase an enema kit from a large pharmacy, or use a similar device to the douche on page 56.

## **GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Irritable bowel syndrome, indigestion, reflux, flatulence, bloating, diarrhoea, colitis, stomach ulcer, restlessness, insomnia, teething, colic.

*Topically:* Eczema, sunburn, inflamed eyes, conjunctivitis, nappy rash, psoriasis, chickenpox, shingles, measles, IBS, bowel ulceration.

*Caution:* Although chamomile is generally a very safe herb, if you have an allergy to ragweed, daisies and chrysanthemums, you may have an allergy to chamomile.

## **HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Tea, tincture, capsule (see pages 33–36). *Topically:* Compress, poultice, cream (see pages 37–41). Adding a pot full of strong, cool chamomile tea to your bath (or baby's bath) will help soothe skin that is red and inflamed. Soak some cottonwool in cold chamomile tea and apply to eyes that are red and sore or for conjunctivitis. For lower bowel ulceration and IBS: chamomile enema.

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Chamomile has elegant feathery leaves and white and yellow flowers that attract bees, butterflies and birds. It prefers a well-drained poor to moderate soil with sunny position, but will tolerate partial shade. A ground-hugging plant, chamomile grows well in herb and vegetable patches, and in pots. Seeds are best sown directly in the soil, and need a fair amount of light to germinate. The seeds are very small, and often root division is an easier proposition for propagation. Once established, it self-seeds readily, so be prepared to devote a patch of ground to the continual growing of chamomile. Divide established plants in spring.

Chamomile is referred to as the 'plants' physician' as it repels pests and improves the health of neighbouring plants. A weak (cool) tea of chamomile is recommended as a spray for plants with fungal infection.

## Chickweed

**B**eloved by chickens and people with dry, itchy skin conditions, chickweed is ubiquitous from Alaska to Tasmania. In the Middle Ages, chickweed was a mainstay vegetable throughout Europe, especially amongst the poor. Not only nutritious, chickweed is a comforting remedy that quickly soothes itching and inflammation.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Leaf, stem, flower (any or all)
Goes well with	For skin healing: comfrey, calendula or gotu kola
<i>Also known as</i>	<i>Stellaria media, starweed</i>
How to use	Food, tea, tincture, capsule, poultice, cream, compress
Climate zones	1–6 (drought tender)
Companion plants	No

Pot	Yes
-----	-----

### **MEDICINAL USES**

Chickweed has traditionally been used as a vegetable and is extremely high in vitamin C. Medicinally it is often used to soothe and heal itchy and inflamed skin conditions including eczema, psoriasis, rashes and burns. It is most often incorporated into creams and compresses, but can also be taken internally for this purpose. Traditionally, it has been used for asthma, lung congestion, gout, arthritis and gastrointestinal ulceration.

### **GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Eczema, arthritis, gout, gastrointestinal ulceration, coughs, asthma.

*Topically:* Haemorrhoids, eczema, psoriasis, rashes, burns, boils.

### **HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Harvest the leaves and stems regularly and add to salads and sandwiches. Stir-fry or cook them as a spinach substitute.

Tea, tincture, capsule (see pages 33–36).

*Topically:* Compress, poultice, cream (see pages 37–41).

### **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Chickweed is seen as an invasive weed in most countries, and is commonly found along creeks, roads and paddocks. It does well in moist, fertile soil, but, as is the way with most weeds, will tolerate a less than ideal environment. Chickweed is a trailing plant with smooth, succulent, egg-shaped leaves and delicate, white-petalled flowers that open during the day and close at nightfall and rainfall. The weak stems branch frequently, taking root at the many junctions. Chickweed grows so abundantly, it can be used as groundcover, or even a living mulch.

## Chilli

Is it pain or is it pleasure? The red-hot sensation you feel when biting into a chilli releases endorphins, the brain's happy hormones. Capsaicin, the chemical responsible for the heat of chillies, and for many of their medicinal actions, is without odour and flavour; nevertheless, you certainly know it's there. The heat of chillies is measured in Scoville Heat Units, named after American pharmacist Wilbur Scoville. The milder jalapeños score 3000 units on the Scoville scale, while the hot Habañeros exceed 300,000 units. Ouch.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Fruit
Goes well with	For circulation: ginger or cinnamon
Also known as	<i>Capsicum annuum</i> , hot peppers
How to use	Food, tincture, compress, cream
Climate zones	1–5

Companion plants	Carrots, onions, mints; dislikes beans, corn, fennel, brassicas
Pot	Yes

**MEDICINAL USES**

Chillies are excellent for restoring poor circulation, warming cold hands and feet, and improving the flow of blood around the body. Studies have shown that eating chillies aids in weight loss. They do this in two ways: firstly by increasing the body’s metabolic rate, which governs how quickly we burn kilojoules, and secondly, eating a meal with chilli has a satiating effect — one feels fuller quicker. Chillies are also good for clearing congestion of the lungs, nose and sinuses. When nerves in the stomach sense the presence of capsaicin, they communicate this information to the respiratory system via the brain, culminating in a hot flash which instantly clears stuffed sinuses and congested lungs.

Chilli compresses and creams are used to reduce the pain of arthritis. This is done by its action as a counterirritant. Counterirritants are a group of herbs that are used topically to bring heat to the surface of the skin. This serves to take the pain away from more internal areas (for example, an arthritic joint) and to increase the circulation to the area, bringing immune cells to heal and lymph vessels to remove toxic matter. As well as chilli, herbs used in this manner include ginger, mustard seed, black pepper and stinging nettles.

The idea of heating and cooling remedies, and hot and cold conditions, is common to most herbal traditions. For instance, a cup of hot ginger and honey (heating remedy) is good when you have a cold with lots of mucus (cold condition). One traditional view is that the body produces heat when it is trying to dispel illness — for example, a fever. A small rise in body temperature, as in mild fever, will increase immune activity.

## **HOT IMPORT**

Although we associate Indian and other Asian cuisines with the hot flavour of chillies, these fiery plants are actually native to Central America. They were only introduced to other parts of the world by the Spanish and Portuguese from the sixteenth century onwards.

## **GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Poor circulation, chilblains, varicose veins, haemorrhoids, weight loss, head colds and flu, sinusitis, bronchitis.

*Topically:* Arthritis pain relief, muscle strain.

*Caution:* As healing as chillies are, there are a few conditions where they should be avoided. Topically, don't apply to broken, damaged or inflamed skin. Prolonged contact may eventuate in a rash or blister; remove immediately if you feel pain. Internally, chillies are not recommended if you suffer from gastritis or stomach ulcers — but you have probably been avoiding them anyway. And lastly, when cutting chillies, do not rub your hands anywhere near your eyes or nose as it will burn like crazy.

## **HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* The best way to use home-grown chillies is to add them to your diet — they are great in curries and stir-fries, or can be made into chilli sauce for use in stews and soups.

*Topically:* Chilli cream (see page 41) can be rubbed onto arthritic joints or aching muscles for pain relief. It is best to buy a commercial ointment from a chemist or health-food shop as they have the correct percentage of chilli to prevent burning. Even so, try on a little patch of skin first, in case you are sensitive. A chilli compress (see page 37) can be used to relieve back pain and muscle strain. Herbalists add only a few drops of chilli tincture (see page 34) to a herbal remedy as it is far too hot to take on its own. For the very keen, and the very cold, chop up some hot chillies and place them at the bottom of your socks.

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Chillies are an easy and decorative plant to grow, as happy in a pot as in the garden. They do well in most climates, but prefer a sunny and warm position. Grow from seed or seedlings and expect to see a crop in around twelve weeks. The heat intensity of the chilli increases as the fruit ripens. There are hundreds of varieties that vary in size, shape, colour and heat. Choose according to your palate. If you have an excess, chillies can be frozen or dried. They require regular, if frugal, watering; excess water will cause the fruit to split.

## Cinnamon

Spice trading was a major economic driver in Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, sending the likes of Marco Polo and Vasco da Gama on long and dangerous voyages of discovery. For the sailors who came from cold, damp Europe, imagine the allure of the exotic scent of cinnamon wafting from the shores of the tropical island paradise of Ceylon.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Difficult
Part used	Bark
Goes well with	For circulation: ginger or chilli
<i>Also known as</i>	<i>Cinnamomum zeylanicum, Ceylon cinnamon</i>
How to use	Tea, tincture
Climate zones	1–3 (drought and frost tender)
Companion plants	No
Pot	No

---

## MEDICINAL USES

Cinnamon is a warming tonic, wonderful for easing winter chills, and also for people who 'feel the cold'. Any herb or spice that improves circulation, as in the case of cinnamon, will serve to improve general health. This is done by improving the flow of blood, oxygen and nutrition to all cells of the body as well as increasing the elimination of waste products and toxins.

Having antiseptic and expectorant qualities, cinnamon can be useful in treating long-term sinus or lung infections. Cinnamon is also used to improve digestive problems, particularly a sluggish digestion, but also where there are spasms, such as colic or tummy cramps. Herbally, cinnamon is rarely used alone. It is an excellent synergistic herb, added to mixtures to impart flavour and warmth. Only a tiny amount is needed or the taste is overwhelming. It works well in remedies for calming, sleep, coughs and colds, and poor digestion. Recent discoveries have shown that cinnamon is useful in the treatment of type 2 diabetes, as it increases the efficacy of insulin. With yet another benefit to a modern plague, it helps to lower cholesterol levels.

The alternative, *Cinnamomum cassia* (cassia), is often sold as cinnamon. Cassia has a coarser, more bitter taste than cinnamon. *Cinnamomum zeylanicum* is the original cinnamon spice, and still the best. It's virtually impossible to visually tell the difference when ground, but when whole, the real cinnamon quill is layered, while the cassia is one thick piece.

## GOOD FOR

*Internally:* Colds and flu, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, bloating, flatulence, irritable bowel syndrome, colic, stomach cramps, sluggish digestion, chilblains, cold hands and feet, chronic infections (particularly sinus, lungs), type 2 diabetes, high cholesterol, promotes sleep.

## HOW TO USE IT

*Internally:* As only small amounts of cinnamon are needed to exert a therapeutic effect, why not include it in your cooking? It's a popular addition to desserts and stewed fruit, but you can also take cinnamon away from sugar and create a curry with a team of therapeutic spices, like chilli and cardamom.

Tea, tincture (see pages 33–34). Chai (see recipe below) is a traditional Indian brew of tea and spices, particularly cinnamon. Healthy and delicious, it's perfect for a cold winter's day, to keep colds and flu at bay.

## ***Chai tea***

---

*1 cinnamon quill*

*1 star anise*

*3 black peppercorns*

*3 cardamom pods*

*3 cm ginger root*

*2 cups water*

*1 tablespoon honey*

*2 teaspoons Assam tea (or any strong black tea)*

*1 cup milk*

Grind the spices in a mortar and pestle. Place in saucepan with two cups cold water. Bring to boil for five minutes. Add honey and black tea, and bring to the boil, until the tea colours the water a deep gold. Then add milk and bring back almost to a boil. Strain and serve.

### **GROWING YOUR OWN**

To grow cinnamon trees, you need to live in a tropical, moist, hot climate, similar to Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon). Cinnamon needs a free-draining soil in a protected position. The tree can grow up to 20 m, but in practice is kept short to facilitate harvest. The stems are

cut and bark scraped away. When dried, the bark curls into the familiar roll or quill. A tree needs to be at least two years old before harvesting the bark, but it is better at eight years old.

## Comfrey

Comfrey, *Symphytum officinale*, has a long history as medicine, vegetable and food for livestock. *Symphytum* is derived from the Greek *symphyo*, to unite, which attests to comfrey's renowned ability to heal broken bones and sprains. In the mid-1980s, however, comfrey was banned from the medicines list, due to the effects of certain alkaloids found within the leaf, and it is not recommended to take comfrey internally. External use of comfrey in creams and poultices is allowed, however, and very effective.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Leaf
Goes well with	For healing: calendula
Also known as	<i>Symphytum officinale</i> , knitbone, boneset
How to use	Cream, compress, poultice
Climate zones	1–6
Companion plants	Avocados, most fruit trees
Pot	Yes

### MEDICINAL USES

Comfrey leaves contain allantoin, a natural chemical that increases cell proliferation and promotes wound healing. Comfrey is often used in the cosmetic world because it enhances the exfoliation of upper layers of dead skin cells. This ‘polishing’ increases the smoothness of the skin. Add to this allantoin, with its healing, soothing and protective effect on the skin, and you have a perfect skin product.

The homeopathic version of comfrey, *Symphytum*, is legal to take internally, and is excellent for helping bones to heal, similar to its other friend in the first-aid cupboard, homeopathic *Arnica*, which helps reduce bruising.

### **GOOD FOR**

*Topically:* Broken bones or fractures, sprains, healing skin, wounds, cuts, ulcers.

### **HOW TO USE IT**

*Topically:* Compress, poultice, cream (see pages 37–41), homeopathic preparation.

### **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Comfrey is seldom seen in nurseries. However, it is highly sought after by keen gardeners, and you should be able to track down a comfrey owner who is willing to share. Plants grow prolifically and they’re easily propagated by digging up a couple of roots. In fact, each piece of broken root has the potential to shoot. Plant in a permanent position, as comfrey can have a very long life. Comfrey is a voracious feeder and can out-compete neighbours for nutrients. Plant in full sun or partial shade, and loosen heavy, compacted soil. Regularly enrich the soil with compost or a nitrogen-rich dressing. Water during dry periods. Regular cutting will stop the plant from flowering so it can put this energy into leaf and root production.

Comfrey is a compost activator. Due to its extensive root system, it draws a rich supply of minerals into its leaves, which, when they rot, deliver the perfect gift to the compost — and your garden. If

you don't have a compost bin, comfrey leaves dug into the soil will still do a sterling job while you busy yourself building or buying a compost bin.

## Damiana

Damiana's botanical name, *Turnera aphrodisiaca*, gives a clue to its traditional use. Indigenous to Central America, damiana was used by the ancient Mayans to enhance the sexual experience. In Mexico a damiana-based liqueur is sold in a bottle shaped as a comely Incan goddess, and is apparently popular among the ladies.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Fairly difficult
Part used	Leaf
Goes well with	<i>Panax ginseng</i> , withania or tribulus
Also known as	<i>Turnera aphrodisiaca</i>
How to use	Tea, tincture, capsule, smoking
Climate zones	1–5 (drought and frost tender)
Companion plants	No
Pot	No

### MEDICINAL USES

European herbal texts of the eighteenth century claimed damiana was a tonic for the 'sexual apparatus' and the current British Herbal Pharmacopoeia recommends it for 'coital inadequacy'. However,

there is much more to recommend damiana. It is useful for mild depression and anxiety. Although seeming to be opposite ends of the psychological spectrum, both depression and anxiety often exist simultaneously, two sides of the same coin. Damiana will help to relieve this situation. Damiana is useful as an energy tonic for both men and women, as well as restoring vitality during convalescence after an operation, illness or periods of stress. Damiana is a bitter herb, and like most bitters is good for the liver and digestion (see box, page 108). It is also a urinary antiseptic good for cystitis and urethritis.

Possibly the first New Ager, mystic Carlos Castaneda, delved into the world of shamanism helped by psychoactive plants such as datura. He recommended smoking damiana leaves to achieve a euphoric state and as a way to focus sexual energy. But smoking damiana may not be good for your lungs.

#### **GARDEN APHRODISIACS**

Before Viagra, the natural world was scoured for aphrodisiacs, from tiger's tackle to jackal's bile, and from ginseng to horny goat weed. Unfortunately, the area of sexuality is a prime target for scam artists, and there are many 'natural' products sold which are as likely to give you 'the horn' as a soggy sock in a hailstorm.

Nevertheless, there is never smoke without fire, and many plant-based aphrodisiacs have retained their reputation for hundreds of years. To have libidinous powers a plant must have one or more of the following attributes: the ability to influence testosterone, the ability to influence circulation and the ability to influence stress.

Testosterone, the 'male' hormone, is what makes us frisky, so, if ingesting a specific plant increases the level of testosterone in the human body, then this is likely to give a boost in the gonadal department. Testosterone is not just for boys, it's what gets girls going too. Although women don't produce a lot of testosterone (about one-thirtieth that of men), what they do have is responsible for more than its fair share of sex drive. Plants that increase testosterone in men and women include *Panax ginseng*, saw palmetto, tribulus, sarsaparilla and damiana.

---

## **GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Low libido (men and women), impotence, anxiety, depression, constipation, digestion, convalescence, cystitis, urethritis.

## **HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Tea, tincture, capsule (see pages 33–36).

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

With sweet-smelling serrated leaves and bright yellow flowers, damiana is a welcome addition to any garden. A prolific, small-flowered shrub common through California, the Gulf of Mexico and Mexico, damiana prefers well-drained, gravelly soil and a hot, sunny climate. Not surprisingly, it is frost-tender. Grown from seed, damiana will need some watering in the early days and during the heat of summer, but can be left alone during the winter months.

## Dandelion

**D**andelion root has a bitter taste, common to digestive herbs. It can be used to make a bitter, black brew which is why dandelion root was used as a coffee substitute during the Second World War when the real bean was a luxury.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Leaf, root, stem
Goes well with	For liver and digestive problems: St Mary's thistle, globe artichoke or turmeric
Also known as	<i>Taraxacum officinale</i> , fairy clock, <i>pissenlit</i> , lion's tooth
How to use	Food, tea, capsule, tincture
Climate zones	1-6
Companion plants	All

Pot	Yes
-----	-----

**MEDICINAL USES**

Dandelion has been used as food and medicine for centuries. Although all parts of the plant contain similar properties, the root is generally used for liver and digestive disorders, the leaves for kidney problems and fluid retention (and as a nutritious food), and the sap from the stems to vanquish warts.

Dandelion leaves contain a bonanza of nutrients, including calcium, phosphorous, potassium, iron, magnesium and vitamin B, and are one of nature’s richest sources of betacarotene, provitamin A. The young leaves are sweet and fresh, making them a terrific addition to salads and cooking. In herbal medicine, the leaves are prescribed primarily in their role as a diuretic, a medicine that increases urine flow. This is useful in treating fluid retention, high blood pressure and PMS. Whereas pharmaceutical diuretics deplete the body of potassium, this is not an issue with dandelion leaves as they contain this mineral in abundance. The French nickname for dandelions, *pissenlit*, translates as ‘wet the bed’.

Dandelion root is a bitter herbal tonic. Bitter herbs have a long tradition in the treatment of liver and digestive disorders (see box, page 108). With regard to the liver, dandelion increases the production and flow of bile. Bile has dual roles in digestion (particularly of fats) and the way in which the liver eliminates waste products, toxins and excess hormones from the bloodstream and into the bowel, from there to be excreted from the body.

When you pick a dandelion flower or clock, the stem will ooze white sap. This sap can be used for warts.

**HERBAL BITTERS**  
James Green, an American herbalist, said: ‘The mistake of eliminating the bitter flavour from our daily experience is like eliminating one of the colours of the rainbow.’ Unfortunately, in Australia, bitter foods are also thin on the

ground. Grapefruit, radicchio, rocket, olives, hops (say yay for the cleansing ale) and coffee are some bitter examples.

Tastebuds are bundles of nerve endings located all over the tongue. Their job is to interpret tastes from the chemicals in food, revealing whether food is yuk or yum, and, more specifically, whether it's sweet, salty, bitter, sour or umami (savoury). Bitter tastebuds connect to the vagus nerve, which stimulates the functioning of the digestive organs — the stomach, pancreas, liver, gallbladder and intestine. One of the main tenets of natural therapies is to improve digestion and liver function, and stimulating the vagus nerve will do this, which explains why bitter herbs have been prescribed since before Hippocrates.

Symptoms of a suffering digestive system include bloating, burping, flatulence and constipation. These symptoms in particular indicate low stomach acid production. Other signs include peeling fingernails, dry lips and increased susceptibility to parasitic and fungal infections and food poisoning (a gastric tummy). As we age, stomach acid production tends to drop. This inhibits absorption of nutrients, especially protein, iron and vitamin B12.

Many European aperitifs, including Campari and Angostura Bitters, incorporate this philosophy. Tickling tastebuds with foul-tasting concoctions is a favourite sport among herbalists. The main bitter herbs include gentian, goldenseal, wormwood, St Mary's thistle and dandelion root. Although taking a tablet would be more palatable, the idea is to *taste* the bitterness. The bitterer, the better. A teaspoon of bitter-tasting herbs in a wineglass of water sipped before dinner will train your digestive system into healthier habits. Bitters enhance your appetite, but will not cause you to overeat, in fact, they will regulate normal appetite.

## **GOOD FOR**

### **Root**

*Internally:* Constipation, sluggish bowel, poor digestion, psoriasis, hepatitis, enlarged liver, enlarged spleen, fatty liver, high cholesterol, jaundice, under-or overeating.

### **Leaf**

*Internally:* As above (although weaker action), plus fluid retention (including fluid retention of PMS), high blood pressure, enlarged breasts.

### **Stem**

*Topically:* Warts.

## **HOW TO USE IT**

### **Root**

*Internally:* Needs to be dried and roasted before using. Wash and dry the large taproot, slicing off any small rootlets. Dry in a cool oven until brittle, then roast it until it reaches a dark, nutty brown. Grind until the size of coarse-ground coffee. Use in tea, tincture, capsules (see pages 33–36).

### **Leaf**

*Internally:* Add fresh, young leaves to salads and juices. Steam or boil older leaves and they will taste like spinach. Use fresh or dried as tea, tincture, capsules (see pages 33–36).

### **Stem**

*Topically:* Apply sap from freshly cut stem daily to warts.

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Dandelions are as easy to grow as ... weeds. After the yellow flowers have died away, what is left is whimsically known as fairy clocks, a perfect sphere of wispy silver seeds with wings. It is well known that if you make a wish before blowing hard on the fairy clock, and all the seeds fly away with one blow, your wish will come true.

The roots of the dandelion grow deeply into the ground, and are best collected in their second year of growth, harvested in autumn after flowering. Pick the young leaves for salads. Dandelions are perennial so, if the root is left alone, the leaves will keep growing. The long root draws up nutrients from deep in the soil. Avoid harvesting dandelions near roads or in public areas as they may have been sprayed with herbicides or exposed to toxic chemicals.

Throw any leftover dandelions onto the compost as they are full of minerals and work as a compost activator in a similar way to comfrey, nettles, yarrow and seaweed.

## Echinacea

**E**chinacea is an indispensable member of any home first-aid cabinet, and dead easy to grow. A bunch of purple-petalled echinacea flowers makes a pretty posy before heading into the teapot, compress or tincture bottle.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Root, leaf, flower (any or all)
Goes well with	For infection: calendula, garlic or thyme; for eyewash: eyebright; for gargle: thyme
Also known as	<i>Echinacea angustifolia</i> , <i>E. purpurea</i> , purple coneflower
How to use	Tea, tincture, capsule, cream, compress, poultice, eyebath
Climate zones	2–6
Companion plants	All. Echinacea attracts butterflies and other pollinating insects

Pot	Yes
-----	-----

### **MEDICINAL USES**

Originally a Native American remedy for snake bites, in the late nineteenth century, echinacea was adopted by herbalists, who used it to treat cholera, dysentery and gangrene. Echinacea is now beloved worldwide for its support of the immune system. Echinacea is effective against bacterial, viral and fungal infections, but where echinacea stars is in its ability to strengthen the immune system to fight its own future battles. Echinacea is a ‘blood purifier’, an old-fashioned term that herbalists use for herbs that help cleanse the bloodstream and lymphatic system. It is often recommended for long-term skin conditions, boils and acne.

Use echinacea to build up the immune system to prevent infections, to treat long-term immune problems including autoimmune conditions, as well as to help reduce the symptoms of acute infections like influenza or tonsillitis. Echinacea is also useful in treating allergies as they are immune-mediated, and echinacea is an immune system modulator.

**ECHINACEA: FACT AND FICTION**

In recent years there have been a few rumours circulating about echinacea. The first is that it should not be used in long-term treatment. This is incorrect: regular consumption of echinacea, especially as a tea, helps to promote a healthy immune system. Another porky is that echinacea will worsen autoimmune conditions (such as rheumatoid arthritis, Crohn’s disease and lupus) as these conditions involve the immune system itself attacking the body. In fact, echinacea doesn’t stimulate the immune response, but supports and modulates it. The last, most frequently encountered misinformation is that asthmatics should avoid echinacea. In fact, echinacea will help those with asthma, particularly in preventing complicating infections such as bronchitis. However, it is true that a small proportion of people can be allergic to echinacea, and this presents as an asthma attack. Echinacea is in

the daisy family, and if there is a known allergy to daisy, ragweed or chrysanthemum, then it's best to avoid echinacea.

## **GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Weakened immune system, coughs, colds, hayfever, sinusitis, tonsillitis, bronchitis, asthma, poor wound healing, mouth ulcers, candida and other vaginal infections, assists in recovery after chemotherapy, glandular fever, cystitis, urethritis, mastitis, abscesses, acne (particularly cystic acne), boils, conjunctivitis, allergies.

*Topically:* Gargle for sore throats, mouth ulcers, tonsillitis and pharyngitis. Eyewash for conjunctivitis. As a wash or cream for any skin infections.

## **HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* The tea, tincture or capsule (see pages 33–36) is useful for improving the immune system for the conditions mentioned above.

*Topically:* A strong tea (cooled) or diluted tincture can be used as a gargle. Other herbs that can be used in conjunction with echinacea in a gargle include calendula and thyme. Why not swallow the gargle for additional benefit? Echinacea tea or dilute tincture (see page 34) can also be used as an eyewash for conjunctivitis. These can also be applied neat to the skin for any skin infection, or in the form of a poultice or compress (see pages 37–38). Echinacea cream (see page 41) is very good for healing skin infections.

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Echinacea is appreciated by the gardening world as a hardy, waterwise plant with pretty, long-stemmed flowers, perfect for garden borders or inside as cut flowers, *and* they bloom all summer. The word 'echinacea' is derived from *echinos*, Greek for hedgehog, due to the brown, prickly points forming a cone in the centre of the mature echinacea flower. The purple petals droop down from this central cone. Once established, echinacea grows a long taproot, allowing it to thrive with minimal watering. Best in deep, well-

drained soil or a raised garden bed, in a sunny position, though it will tolerate partial shade. Propagation is by seed or division. Divide the plants in autumn after foliage has died back. So pretty and popular is the echinacea flower that it has been cultivated in a variety of colours from white to yellow and orange. However, the purple echinacea is the one traditionally used for medicine.

## Eyebright

The chirpy little eyebright flower resembles a wide open eye with fluttering eyelashes, albeit a little bloodshot. Coincidence or not, eyebright does actually work wonders on all sorts of eye problems, and has long been used in Europe for this purpose. A fourteenth-century text recommends using eyebright for ‘all evils of the eye’.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Care needed
Part used	Flower, leaf, stem (any or all)
Goes well with	For eyewash: calendula, echinacea or goldenseal; for sinusitis: echinacea or garlic
Also known as	<i>Euphrasia officinalis</i>
How to use	Tea, tincture, capsule, eyewash
Climate zones	5, 6
Companion	Needs grasses to prosper

plants	
Pot	Yes

**MEDICINAL USES**

Eyebright has an astringent and antibacterial effect on mucous membranes, making it the ideal remedy for eye conditions such as conjunctivitis (an inflammation and infection of the lining of the eyes), blepharitis (inflammation and infection of the eyelid near where the eyelashes are attached) and styes; as well as further afield to sinus problems and ear infection. It is also indicated whenever watery secretions occur, such as hayfever and sneezing. Models swear by eyebright eyewash to whiten and brighten their eyes before a photo shoot.

**GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Conjunctivitis, sinusitis, common cold, hayfever, sore throat, ear infections.

*Topically:* Conjunctivitis; blepharitis; styes; red, sore and tired eyes; to obtain bright eyes.

**HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Tea, tincture, capsule (see pages 33–36).

*Topically:* Dilute tincture of eyebright with warm water and use as an eyewash, or use cooled, strong tea (see pages 33–34).

**DOCTRINE OF SIGNATURES**

The Doctrine of Signatures is an ancient belief whose origin is lost in the mists of time. It purports that certain physical attributes of a plant, including colour, shape, texture and even smell, indicates its therapeutic value. According to this doctrine, eyebright, with its flower like a bloodshot eye, is thus good for eyesight, and the yellow latex of celandine good for liver problems (in which the telltale yellow of jaundice is a major symptom giveaway). Also, walnut halves and ginkgo leaves are blatantly brain-like —

and walnuts contain melatonin and they are high in omega-three fatty acids (essential for brain health), while ginkgo helps brain function and may even help prevent Alzheimer's disease.

Pliny the Elder, Dioscorides, Paracelsus and Nicholas Culpeper were among the physicians who believed in the Doctrine of Signatures. However, from the eighteenth century on, the concept was ridiculed. Researchers and apologists now believe that at most the doctrine was a mnemonic, or learning aid, for physicians to learn their *materia medica*. The actions of the plants were known well before the physical similarity to the illness or body part was noticed.

Regardless of its veracity, the notion that comes from the Hermetic\* literature that 'God has endowed each herb, each stone, each star, and each sign with a "secret" which, when it becomes known to man, will be of utility' is a seductive one.

\*Hermetic writings are Greek in origin and reflect the ancient Greeks' respect for Egyptian wisdom and occultism. Hermetic literature is frequently alluded to in medieval and Renaissance writing.

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Although frequently found in the wild in Europe, eyebright can be grown from seed. A small, delicate herb, eyebright prefers full sun and a slightly alkaline soil. Eyebright is a semi-parasitic plant, feeding on the roots of other plants to survive, particularly grasses and clover. However, it doesn't appear to affect the health of its host. Seed needs to be sown among the host plant. This is one time to leave the weeds alone.

## Fennel

A thirteenth-century herbal claimed that ‘fennel seed drunk with wine stirreth lechery’. It is likely that any stirring is more wine-induced than fennel-induced, but worth a try just in case. It is a beautiful-looking plant with feathery green leaves that release the smell of aniseed as you brush by.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Seeds have the strongest effects; the leaves and bulb have a similar but weaker action
Goes well with	For colic: chamomile or lemon balm
Also known as	<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i>
How to use	Food, juice, tea, tincture, capsule
Climate zones	1–6
Companion	Most plants dislike fennel. However, it does

plants	attract beneficial insects to the garden
Pot	No

**MEDICINAL USES**

‘Fennel water’ has long been used as a gentle antispasmodic for the digestive tract, which makes it just wonderful for wind, flatulence and bloating. It’s also useful for colic in babies. Studies have shown that fennel reduces appetite and food cravings, making it helpful for those who wish to shed a few kilos, and also kills that persistent sweet tooth, which often sabotages healthy eating. Fennel has a very slight phytohormone action, which explains why it has historically been used to improve milk flow in breastfeeding women. Fleas despise fennel. Dogs and cats despise fleas.

**GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Colic, dyspepsia, flatulence, bloating, irritable bowel syndrome, reducing appetite, improving breast milk flow, weight loss. *Topically:* Fleas.

**HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Fennel seeds are the part of the plant usually prescribed in herbal medicine, however, the bulb and leaves also exert similar but slightly weaker action. The seeds can be made into a tea, tincture or capsules (see pages 33–36). A diluted tea is excellent for babies with colic or digestive problems. The fennel bulb makes a refreshing salad vegetable or can be eaten on its own like an apple, and is also delicious baked in the oven, and can also be braised. Fennel seeds are often sprinkled on top of bread.

*Topically:* For a flea repellent, juice some fennel and rub it through the dog’s fur. This technique will end in tears when used on pussy cats.

**GROWING YOUR OWN**

A Mediterranean native, fennel is ridiculously easy to grow. It prefers full sun but can tolerate partial shade. While fennel is reasonably drought-tolerant, if you intend to dine on the bulb, regular watering will produce a juicier, more palatable vegetable. A moist, well-drained soil is best, but fennel will grow in most soils. Apply a liquid fertiliser regularly. Fennel is generally pest and disease free, and due to its strong odour can protect neighbouring plants that are more vulnerable. Grows from seeds or root cuttings. Fennel has a tendency to bolt and go to seed, so much so that it easily becomes a weed. Keep an eye on it if you live near the bush where it could spread.

## Feverfew

The name is a giveaway. Feverfew's traditional use was to reduce fevers. However, in 1663 in his *Herbal*, John Gerard did make mention of what is today's most popular use for feverfew — as a preventative for migraine — when he said '[it is] ... very good for them that are giddy in the head'.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Leaf
Goes well with	For arthritis: ginger; for migraines: California poppy
<i>Also known as</i>	<i>Tanacetum parthenium</i>
How to use	Food, tea, tincture, capsule
Climate zones	1–6
Companion plants	Roses
Pot	Yes

## MEDICINAL USES

In 1973, Mrs Anne Jenkins, a Welsh woman who suffered horrendous migraines, took the advice of a traditional Welsh herbalist and ate three fresh feverfew leaves every day. Within ten months her migraines had vanished. A miracle cure was born. The story spread throughout the UK and a string of trials ensued, showing similar results. Feverfew doesn't work for everyone, but those for whom it does are grateful lifetime devotees. One needs to keep taking the medicine, as migraines will recommence if feverfew intake is interrupted. Another caution is that fresh feverfew can cause mouth ulcers; in this case it is best to take capsules.

Feverfew is effective for reducing fevers, helpful in coughs and asthma, and is used for arthritis, particularly if there is associated facial pain. It can be taken internally, or used as a poultice to ease the pain. Topically, the tea or tincture will help healing from bites and stings. Feverfew is a bitter herb and, similar to most bitters, is good for stimulating digestion.

## GOOD FOR

*Internally:* Helps prevent tension headaches and migraines and the symptoms thereof (including nausea and vomiting), arthritis (particularly for facial pain), fever of colds and flu, joint pain in flu, hayfever, bloating, flatulence, burping and indigestion.

*Topically:* Bites and stings, arthritis.

*Caution:* Eating raw leaves may result in mouth ulcers; some people note a type of dermatitis after picking the plant. If you have an allergy to chrysanthemums, you may well be allergic to feverfew. Feverfew is not recommended during pregnancy.

## HOW TO USE IT

*Internally:* For a cough or asthma, brew a tea (see page 33) and add honey. Drink several cups a day. To prevent migraines, either eat two to three fresh leaves daily in a salad or sandwich, or else take as a tincture or capsule (see pages 34–36). *Topically:* Poultice for

arthritic pain (see page 38). Tea or tincture (see pages 33–36) for bites and stings.

### **GROWING YOUR OWN**

On first glance, feverfew looks a little like the chamomile plant, with small, bright, daisy-like flowers with white petals and yellow centres. However, feverfew's leaves are more feathery and the flower stem more upright. Additionally, unlike chamomile, feverfew has an unpleasant, bitter smell and taste that drives away bees. Feverfew is easy to grow in sun or partial shade from seed, cuttings and division. The plant readily self-seeds. It makes a fine ornamental rockery plant or, if there is room, a creative groundcover.

## Garlic

If an apple a day keeps the doctor away, eating garlic will ward off your naturopath. Apart from being an indispensable ingredient in any tasty meal, garlic is one of the most therapeutic foods you can eat.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Bulb
Goes well with	For general immunity: echinacea, calendula or astragalus
Also known as	<i>Allium sativum</i>
How to use	Food, tablet, capsule
Climate zones	1–6
Companion plants	Roses, tomatoes, apples; dislikes beans, peas, strawberries, cabbages

Pot	Yes
-----	-----

### **MEDICINAL USES**

Garlic has several roles in healing, the main being as a broad-spectrum antimicrobial. Effective against bacteria, fungi, intestinal parasites, worms and viruses, it also boosts the immune system. Garlic is brilliant in treating and helping to prevent coughs and colds, as well as other infections, including thrush. Allied to this antibiotic role is its action as a ‘mucolytic’ herb, meaning it reduces mucous viscosity (thickness), allowing mucus to be easily coughed up or blown out, rather than creating a breeding ground for bacteria. A second major role is as an agent against heart disease. Garlic helps reduce cholesterol, especially the ‘bad’ LDL variety, as well as lowering other risk factors including high blood pressure and blood fats (triglycerides).

Garlic reveals its unmistakable fragrance when crushed or cut. This is due to the release of an enzyme (alliinase) which converts one non-smelly substance (alliin) to a smelly one (allicin). Allicin is behind most of garlic’s therapeutic power.

Another role of garlic is its ability to detoxify the body from heavy metal toxicity, including lead, mercury and cadmium. It also plays a role in reducing the harmful effects of radiation, including radiotherapy for cancer. Garlic will not reduce the effectiveness of the treatment, but may help to reduce any collateral harm to healthy tissue. Garlic is also a powerful antioxidant, which may lie behind the reason it helps prevent certain cancers. Garlic is also a rich source of nutrients, including calcium, phosphorus, iron and vitamins B1 and C.

Despite all its extraordinary qualities, garlic breath is the one reason why many people don’t use garlic as food or medicine. Eating parsley will help reduce this symptom, and many people attest that eating some garlic daily is the secret to minimising odour. Another way is to convert all your friends and family to the benefits of garlic.

## **GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Reducing cholesterol (especially ‘bad’ LDL cholesterol), blood triglycerides and high blood pressure. Helps prevent and treat bronchitis, coughs, sinusitis, colds and flu. Use whenever and wherever there is infection present in the body. Helps protect against certain cancers, including stomach and bowel. Mercury, lead and cadmium detoxification.

*Topically:* Ringworm, tinea (athlete’s foot).

*Caution:* Some people find eating raw garlic too strong, and in some cases it can irritate the lining of the stomach. If this is you, don’t persist, but you can still get some therapeutic value from eating garlic’s weaker cousin, the onion. Some babies develop colic when drinking breast milk after Mum has eaten garlic or onions.

## **HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Eating as little as one clove a day helps protect against heart disease and cancer and boosts the immune system, while three to five cloves a day is more of a therapeutic treatment dose. Garlic is only antibiotic in its raw form, but all other actions work just as well when garlic is cooked. Most people prefer to eat garlic rather than drink it as a tea or tincture (see pages 33–34), but it can be made. Tablets of freeze-dried garlic are available.

*Topically:* Fresh garlic juice can be applied directly to ringworm and tinea, but desist if irritation occurs.

### **FOUR THIEVES VINEGAR**

During the 1721 plague in Marseilles, four prisoners were released to gather and bury the dead. To everyone’s surprise they remained healthy. Their freedom was granted in return for the recipe based on garlic they claimed saved them from contracting the plague. It became famous as *Vinaigre des Quatre Voleurs* (Four Thieves Vinegar).

## ***Whole roasted garlic***

---

This makes a magnificent accompaniment to a roast dinner. The cloves slip easily out of their papery sleeves and the taste is creamy and surprisingly mild. Slice a few millimetres off the top of a whole bulb of garlic. Drizzle with a little extra virgin olive oil and a sprinkling of sea salt. Cover with foil and bake at 150–180°C alongside your chicken or lamb roast for one hour.

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Growing garlic is very much fishes and loaves: sow one small garlic clove in winter, forget about it, and harvest a generous bulb full of cloves come summertime. Tradition says the best time to plant garlic is the shortest day of the year (the winter solstice, around 22 June), and the best day to harvest on the longest day (the summer solstice, around 22 December). However in practice just sow in winter, harvest summer. Preferring a well-drained soil, garlic grows well in a sunny position. As the seeds from the flower are often infertile, garlic is best grown from cloves. The unusual flowers make a striking and long-lasting display. Use garlic bulbs harvested from last year or buy organic bulbs.

The garlic bulb comprises several cloves encased in papery skin. Pull apart and push each clove, complete with papery skin, into the soil pointy end up. Plant 20 cm apart and dust the soil with lime. Water regularly until flowering then reduce watering so the bulbs can harden and mature. Too much water will cause the bulbs to rot. Dark, flat, strappy leaves emerge from the clove, and later a stalk and flower appear, which can grow up to 60 cm. When the leaves die back is the sign to harvest. Pull the bulbs out of the ground and allow to dry in a shady, airy place, hanging in nets or between newspaper in a cardboard box where they can be kept for up to twelve months. The larger giant, or Russian, garlic is weaker in taste and medicinal action.

## Ginger

**G**inger is a close relative of turmeric and galangal. If you met them all together at a function you would appreciate the strong family resemblance — looking like a root, gnarly and jaundiced. Ginger is included in the *materia medicas* of all major herbal traditions including Ayurveda, Arabic, European and Traditional Chinese Medicine.

You might think the botanical name for ginger, *Zingiber officinale*, comes from the *zing* eating ginger provides, but in fact the name ultimately derives from the Sanskrit, *Singebera*, meaning ‘horned’ or ‘with antlers’, a pretty good description of the branches of a large ginger rhizome. Pliny the Elder claimed ginger came from the fabled land of the Troglodytes. There may have been a cave-dwelling tribe of ginger growers, but it is more likely that the ginger came to Rome via trade routes through Egypt from India. In the fifth century, Chinese vessels carried ginger growing in pots; eating small amounts of ginger prevented the sailors from developing scurvy, a vitamin C deficiency and the cause of thousands of deaths at sea. Ginger was the most important spice in medieval Europe. Gingerbread, ginger beer and ginger ale all date from this time.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Root (rhizome)
Goes well	For circulation: chilli; for nausea:

with	peppermint; for arthritis: celery; for stress: kava
<i>Also known as</i>	<i>Zingiber officinale, root ginger</i>
How to use	Tea, tincture, capsule, compress, poultice, footbath
Climate zones	1–5, warmer parts of 6 (drought and frost tender)
Companion plants	No
Pot	Yes

## MEDICINAL USES

In China, ginger is known as ‘king of the stomach’. It is indeed a digestive tonic par excellence, reducing nausea and bloating and aiding digestion. Perhaps best known for its role in treating nausea and vomiting, ginger is recommended for morning sickness, motion sickness — in fact, any time anyone feels queasy. Sipping a hot ginger and honey drink brings great comfort when nauseous.

Ginger regulates peristalsis, the rhythmic downward movement of the muscular wall that lines the entire digestive system. This regulation and relaxation of the muscle wall, as well as the fact that ginger is extremely anti-inflammatory and antispasmodic, enables it to help calm all sorts of cramping conditions of the bowel, including irritable bowel syndrome, diarrhoea and cramping. The other muscle ginger helps soothe is the uterus, making it an excellent medicine for period cramps. It can be used internally as tea, tincture

or capsule, as well as externally as a compress or poultice. Arthritis is another condition which is relieved by the anti-inflammatory action of ginger, both internally and externally.

In addition to these impressive digestive powers, ginger helps lower cortisol levels in the body. Cortisol is the ‘other’ stress hormone — adrenaline’s less well-known cousin. Cortisol is released from the adrenal glands in response to chronic stress, whether from lack of sleep, illness or emotional distress. Anything that reduces cortisol (like meditation) is to be encouraged, as long-term stress — and high cortisol levels — is behind many illnesses.

Ginger is also an excellent tonic for the circulation, assisting the flow of blood. Regular ingestion of ginger will help those who can’t abide the cold, and is essential medicine alongside chilli for those who suffer from chilblains. A ginger footbath warms up the whole body. Ginger has been shown to reduce blood stickiness and cholesterol, heart disease risk factors.

#### **CULINARY USES**

A versatile spice, ginger is used to flavour sweet and savoury dishes. It can be sliced, chopped, grated, juiced, minced, mashed or ground. Ginger is just as happy in curries and stir-fries as in drinks, pickles, chutneys, sauces and cakes. The reason ginger is so adaptable is its mild, pepper-like pungency that complements, rather than overpowers, other flavours. This pungency comes from gingerols, chemically similar to chilli’s capsaicin and black pepper’s piperine. When ginger is dried, these chemicals jiggle an atom or two and are transformed into shogaols, which are darker and stronger tasting than the fresh version. This explains why powdered ginger (often used in cakes), is a completely different animal from the fresh product.

#### **GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Motion sickness, morning sickness, nausea, post-operative nausea, nausea from chemotherapy, cramping, vomiting, colic, diarrhoea, bloating, flatulence, abdominal cramping, painful periods, common cold, coughs, osteoarthritis, irritable bowel

syndrome, poor circulation, chilblains, arthritis, stress, high cholesterol.

*Topically:* Arthritis, joint pain, painful periods, back pain. *Caution:* If you're on warfarin or any other blood-thinning medication, take only small quantities of ginger tincture, in case the tincture interacts with the medication. Ginger tea and ginger in food will not cause any problems.

## HOW TO USE IT

*Internally:* In food, tea, tincture, capsule (see pages 33–36). *Topically:* Hand bath, footbath (see page 33); compress, poultice (see pages 37–38). Ginger poultices may be fiddly but are fabulous for period cramps, muscle and joint pain. Into the middle of a kitchen wipe or muslin cloth grate a cupful of ginger. Fold to form a ginger parcel. Place in a shallow bowl and pour over half a cup of boiling water. Leave until bearably hot. Gently squeeze and place on the painful area, then wrap the body part and parcel with plastic wrap. Wrap again in a towel, then relax and keep warm for twenty minutes before unpeeling.

## GROWING YOUR OWN

An easy plant to grow if you live in a humid environment, ginger needs filtered sunlight and a sheltered spot. Owing to ginger's tropical heritage it needs regular and thorough watering. The ginger 'root' is actually a rhizome, with smaller rhizomes branching from the main one. Nevertheless, it is still referred to as root ginger. Buy some organic root ginger that is already starting to shoot. Organically grown means it has not been sprayed with chemicals or growth retardants. Bury 5–10 cm deep in well-composted soil in the garden or in a large pot. The ginger is ready to harvest at the end of summer after the leaves have died down. Dig up a few rhizomes for your own use, leaving enough in the ground for future years. Cut the plant back to the ground after flowering. The flowers of medicinal ginger are smaller and less exotic than the ornamental gingers — why not grow both?

## Ginkgo

The ginkgo tree is the oldest-known species of tree on the planet, with evidence it has been on earth unchanged for 150 million years. An individual tree has a potential life span of 1000 years. No wonder ginkgo is recommended for the effects of ageing.

In its homeland of China, the ginkgo tree is regarded as sacred, however, it is only since the 1960s that ginkgo leaves have been extensively researched and used for medicine.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Leaf
Goes well with	For memory: gotu kola or brahmi; for circulation: ginger, chilli, nettle or horse chestnut
Also known as	<i>Ginkgo biloba</i> , maidenhair tree
How to use	Tea, tincture, capsule
Climate zones	5, 6

Companion plants	No
Pot	Dwarf varieties available

**MEDICINAL USES**

Ginkgo improves memory, especially in the elderly, and increases blood flow to those hard-to-get-to places like the brain, fingers and toes. There are encouraging studies showing ginkgo may improve the symptoms and possibly delay the progression of dementia and Alzheimer’s disease. It is also helpful in treating diabetic retinopathy and neuropathy and may be useful for erectile dysfunction, particularly if this is due to poor circulation. Ginkgo helps prevent mountain disease (altitude sickness), so take some before your next Everest attempt. Improving circulation takes time, so be prepared to wait for a couple of months before you determine whether ginkgo is working for you.

**GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Prevention of stroke, treatment after stroke, tinnitus, improves memory and cognitive ability, dementia, tonic for the elderly, macular degeneration, poor circulation, chilblains, effects of high altitude, Raynaud’s syndrome, leg ulcers, erectile dysfunction.

**HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Tea, tincture, capsule (see pages 33–36).

**GINKGO NUTS**

The fruits of the female ginkgo tree are large nuts covered by a thin layer of flesh. The flesh has an unattractive odour that has been described as smelling like a sewerage works on a hot day. Once you get past the smell factor, the nut from the female fruit is delicious and nutritious, tasting like a large chestnut. In China and Japan it is regarded as a delicacy with aphrodisiac

powers. However, when raw the nut contains toxins. These are destroyed by heat, so it needs to be roasted or boiled before eating.

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Given their long history, it is safe to assume ginkgo trees are tough customers. In Japan, ginkgo trees growing a kilometre from the epicentre survived the Hiroshima blast.

A beautiful ornamental deciduous tree, ginkgo has leaves that turn from a fresh pea green to yellow in autumn. The leaves have two lobes (biloba) and resemble a giant maidenhair fern. Ginkgos prefer a sunny position and can tolerate a poor soil. They grow from 20 to 50 m in height, especially in their homeland of China, so allow plenty of room for your ginkgo tree. Ginkgos are dioecious, that is a plant with separate male and female sexes. The male trees carry pollen cones, while the female ones bear fruits. Breeding ginkgo takes patience, as the trees can take 25 years to reach maturity. Far easier to buy seedlings, young trees or cuttings — invariably these are male trees due to the unfortunate odour of the female fruit (see box, page 134).

## Globe artichoke

**A**rtichokes are spectacular plants in the garden as they have dramatic grey foliage with prehistoric-looking purple-bronze heads that make a wonderful table arrangement before they visit the pot for dinner. One of the earliest cultivated vegetables, globe artichokes were used for medicine and food by the ancient Greeks and Romans.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Fairly easy
Part used	Herbal use: the leaf; culinary use: the flower — the ‘heart’ and tender surrounding leaves
Goes well with	For liver: dandelion, St Mary’s thistle; for skin conditions: burdock, nettles or cleavers
Also known as	<i>Cynara cardunculus</i> , <i>C. scolymus</i>
How to use	Food, tea, tincture, capsule
Climate zones	5, 6

Companion plants	Nasturtiums, parsley, peas
Pot	No

**MEDICINAL USES**

Globe artichoke is recommended for anything and everything to do with the liver. The plant protects liver cells from damage, and helps to repair them if they have been damaged by illness or excess. Cynarin, a natural chemical in artichokes, increases bile secretion. It also sweetens the taste of anything you eat afterwards. Bile is created by the liver and is part digestive juice (especially for breaking down fats) and part garbage service, ridding the body of unwanted toxins that the liver has deemed unfit and other matter including excess cholesterol. As the liver is a major organ of elimination, improving its function helps with many conditions seemingly unrelated to the liver, including constipation, flatulence and bloating. Very often skin conditions such as eczema and psoriasis will clear if the liver is treated with kindness. Excess hormones are excreted by the liver and this may help with certain symptoms of PMS, including breast tenderness, weight gain and moodiness. Globe artichokes are also an effective diuretic (increases urine flow), good for fluid retention, high blood pressure and painful breasts of PMS. Globe artichoke has extremely high levels of antioxidants, protective against heart disease and cancer.

**GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* High blood fats, jaundice, constipation, flatulence, bloating, lowering LDL (bad) cholesterol but increasing HDL (good) cholesterol, eczema, itching skin, psoriasis, fluid retention, PMS, high blood pressure, the effects on the liver from hepatitis, cirrhosis and heavy drinking.

**HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Eat as a vegetable. Tea, tincture, capsule (see pages 33–36).

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Artichokes thrive in rich, fertile soils, and can even be planted directly into composted manure. They like to spread out, so make sure to leave enough room in your garden so they can extend to their full glory. The leaves are the part of the plant used medicinally, but it would be a shame to grow these majestic plants without developing a fetish for the armadillo-like artichoke. The first head of artichoke is the biggest; smaller ones will grow off the main stem. After you have harvested the last artichoke, cut down the stem to a few centimetres from the ground and mulch well to protect the roots until next season. If left uneaten, the artichoke head goes on to produce a striking purple, thistle-like flower. Artichokes can be grown from seed or the suckers that grow from the side and base of the plant. They are deep-rooted, so after establishing themselves, require little water. Ladybirds are attracted to artichokes, and ladybirds are a garden's best friend, as they eat aphids and other pests.

## Gotu kola

**G**otu kola is considered an elixir of good health and long life. The Sinhalese (Sri Lankans) say that eating just two leaves of gotu kola a day will keep old age away. In China, Li Ching-Yun, the original tai chi master, purportedly lived to be 256 by eating gotu kola leaves — and, one imagines, regularly practising tai chi.

Gotu kola is known in some places as brahmi, which is a little confusing, as *Bacopa monnieri* is also known as brahmi (see page 71). However, in this book, and most commonly, *Bacopa* is brahmi and gotu kola is gotu kola!

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Leaf, stem, flower (any or all)
Goes well with	For memory: ginkgo; for healing: calendula or comfrey
Also known as	<i>Centella asiatica</i> , also <i>Hydrocotyle asiatica</i> , Indian pennywort, brahmi
How to use	Food, tea, tincture, capsule, compress, poultice, cream
Climate	1–6

zones	
Companion plants	No
Pot	Yes

**MEDICINAL USES**

Gotu kola targets two main areas, the brain and tissue repair. As both areas have a tendency to go downhill over the years, this supports the historical use of this herb as an anti-ageing tonic. It is known that elephants enjoy grazing on gotu kola leaves, and they know a thing or two about memory and living to a ripe old age.

Gotu kola improves memory and cognitive function. It also has an uplifting and calming effect on mood. These qualities make this herb invaluable for students and those with work that requires mental effort and stress.

Many studies have shown that gotu kola improves the rate of healing. This is done by reducing inflammation and promoting the production and repair of collagen. Collagen is the major protein in the body, part of skin, ligaments, blood vessels and bone. Gotu kola improves the rate of healing both applied topically and taken internally. It is this collagen-enhancing attribute that makes gotu kola a favourite ingredient in top-quality cosmetics as it improves the look and feel of the skin. Gotu kola is particularly useful in the prevention and treatment of keloid scarring, a condition where there is an overgrowth of scar tissue.

**GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Broken bones, fractures, strained ligaments and tendons, gastritis, ulcers, keloid scarring, poor concentration and memory, irritability, eczema, psoriasis, varicose veins, poor wound healing.

*Topically:* Broken bones, fractures, strained ligaments, eczema, psoriasis.

## HOW TO USE IT

*Internally:* Used as a leafy green in Sri Lankan cuisine, the small young leaves can be added to salads; the older leaves can be stir-fried or steamed. Gotu kola as a tea, tincture or capsule (see pages 33–36) can be used for a host of conditions to heal skin, bone and muscle.

*Topically:* A compress, poultice or cream (see pages 37–41) is healing over muscular or skeletal injuries or irritated skin conditions such as eczema.

### DECAF KOLA

Gotu kola is no relation to the kola nut, a caffeine-containing ingredient of cola soft drink. Gotu kola is caffeine-free.

## GROWING YOUR OWN

Gotu kola creates a luxuriant groundcover with fleshy leaves and tiny pink to purple flowers. It is well suited to wet or boggy areas, beside — or even in — a pond. Gotu kola easily takes root at the nodules of stems. Just place it on the ground and watch it take over. There are lots of similar-looking plants, so ensure that your gotu kola is the real deal by consulting a nursery or botanist.

## Grape

It's universally acknowledged that a glass of red wine is good for you. The pigments that colour the wine red are antioxidants called anthocyanins, obtained from the skin of the grape, and these are responsible for the health claims. In truth, there are just as many anthocyanins in a glass of red grape juice as in a glass of red wine. The magic of marketing? However, the other part of the equation is that moderate consumption of alcohol (one or two standard drinks a day) helps prevent heart disease, whether the alcohol is in the form of wine, beer or spirits. So if you don't enjoy red wine but do enjoy a drink, bottoms up, but also add a handful of ruby red grapes to your fruit bowl. Don't spit the pips: grape seeds are very good for you too.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Fairly easy
Part used	Culinary use: fruit, leaf; herbal use: seed, leaf
Goes well with	As general antioxidant: berries or papaya (sounds like a fruit salad)
Also known as	<i>Vitis vinifera</i>
How to use	Fruit: food, drink; seed: food, tincture,

	capsule; leaf: food, tea
Climate zones	3–6
Companion plants	Geranium, mulberries, basil, peas, beans
Pot	Yes

## **MEDICINAL USES**

### **Fruit**

Anthocyanins found in the skin of red grapes have formidable antioxidant credentials, helping to prevent heart disease and cancer. Additionally, they protect and stabilise collagen in the body. Collagen is the principal protein component of bone, cartilage, tendons and skin.

### **Seed**

Whether from green or red grapes, grape seeds are high in oligomeric proanthocyanidins (OPCs). OPCs help strengthen and protect blood vessel walls, particularly veins and capillaries, including a condition known as venous insufficiency, when the veins of the legs have difficulty sending blood upwards, resulting in varicose veins, varicose ulcers, puffy legs and ankles, and feelings of heaviness. OPCs also protect liver cells from damage.

### **Leaf**

Most often used in cooking, especially in Greek cuisine, such as dolmades. Medicinally, in a tea or tincture, vine leaves help reduce the symptoms of diarrhoea and heavy bleeding during periods and after childbirth.

## **GOOD FOR**

## **Fruit**

*Internally:* Red grapes help prevent heart disease, cancer; all grapes are good for constipation.

## **Seed**

*Internally:* Venous insufficiency, including haemorrhoids, varicose veins, puffy ankles and legs; improves wound healing, diabetic retinopathy, neuropathy, poor night vision, age-related macular degeneration, helping deal with glare. **Leaf**

*Internally:* Diarrhoea, heavy periods, post-birth bleeding.

## **HOW TO USE IT**

### **Fruit**

*Internally:* Food, juice, wine.

### **Seed**

*Internally:* Tincture, capsule (see pages 34–36).

### **Leaf**

*Internally:* Tea, tincture (see pages 33–34).

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Grapes are one of the longest-cultivated plants. Grapevines have a tendency to take over; in horticultural parlance this is known as a ‘vigorous spreading habit’, so take control early on. Grapes prefer full sun and deep, well-drained soil. Water generously throughout the growing season. Grapevines do well trained along arches or frames — and why not espalier? Grape seeds are notoriously difficult to germinate and, if you are successful, the resulting plant will be less productive than the parent. This is why grapes are typically planted from grafted stock or cuttings. Dig the hole for the plant; before placing the vine in the hole, add a pile of compost to the bottom then drape the roots over. Grapevines need to be pruned ferociously in winter after the leaves have fallen, taking around 90 per cent off the previous year’s growth. Grapes are prone to black spot, powdery mildew and caterpillars. Treat accordingly (see Pests

and diseases, page 22). Phylloxera is a disease that cannot be cured, and affected plants should be destroyed, not composted.

## Grapefruit

Ever since the 1930s, when the Hollywood, or Grapefruit, Diet became popular, grapefruit have been associated with weight loss. Which is a shame really, because there is not much evidence backing up this claim. However, if you eat half a grapefruit and drink a glass of grapefruit juice several times a day, exercise like a demon, and consume no more than 800 calories (3400 kJ), you too can lose weight on the Hollywood Diet. Nevertheless, grapefruit do offer various other health benefits.

In recent years, grapefruit seeds have been garnering attention as a natural antimicrobial.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Fairly easy
Part used	Herbal use: seed; culinary use: fruit
Goes well with	As an antimicrobial: garlic; for liver health: dandelion, globe artichoke or St Mary's thistle
Also known as	<i>Citrus x paradisi</i>
How to use	Fruit: food; seeds: food, tincture

Climate zones	1–6 (the warmer the sweeter)
Companion plant	Comfrey
Pot	No

## MEDICINAL USES

Grapefruit helps normalise hematocrit levels. Hematocrit is the percentage of red blood cells in our blood, so it is potentially useful in those with a tendency for anaemia. Ruby grapefruit not only taste great, the pink colour is due to the antioxidant pigment lycopene, helpful for guarding against prostate, bladder, lung, cervical and skin cancers. One of the few bitter fruits (especially the pith), grapefruit helps the liver and digestion by activating the bitter tastebuds, which in turn trigger the vagus nerve to stimulate the liver, gallbladder and entire digestive tract.

Grapefruit seeds are strongly antimicrobial, effective against many types of bacteria, including *E. coli*, *Salmonella* and *Staphylococcus*, as well as fungal infections such as *Candida albicans* and *Aspergillus*, and certain protozoa. For this reason, grapefruit seed extract is widely used in the food and cosmetic industry as a preservative, preventing spoilage of products by these microbes. These natural antiseptic powers seem to be selective, however, leaving alone various beneficial microbes, including the ‘good bug’ acidophilus. Eating a couple of seeds daily (or a drop or two of grapefruit seed tincture) will kill various ‘bad bugs’, such as *Candida albicans*, in the digestive tract, leaving room for more harmonious individuals of the bowel microflora population. But be warned: grapefruit seeds are lip-curlingly bitter.

## GOOD FOR

## **Fruit**

*Internally:* Anaemia, constipation, sluggish liver. Ruby grapefruit helps guard against prostate and other cancers.

## **Seed**

*Internally:* Candida, fungal and parasitic infections, especially of the bowel.

*Topically:* Fungal and bacterial infections of skin and nails.

*Caution:* Grapefruit juice and pulp contain chemicals that slow the actions of certain enzymes in the liver (P450 3A4) that metabolise some drugs. For this reason, if you enjoy drinking grapefruit juice, and take prescription medication, ask your practitioner if there is any interaction between your medication and grapefruit.

## **HOW TO USE IT**

### **Fruit**

*Internally:* Eat fresh fruit or drink the juice. **Seed**

*Internally:* Chew one or two seeds daily, or take four to five drops of tincture (see page 34). Grapefruit seed is extremely bitter, and may be toxic in large amounts. *Topically:* Apply the tincture direct to fungal or bacterial condition of skin or nails.

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

It is thought to be the clustering habit of the fruit as they hang on the tree like a bunch of grapes, rather than the taste, which explains the name grapefruit. A card-carrying member of the citrus family, grapefruit similarly thrives in a sheltered, sunny position with fertile soil. It will tolerate light frosts.

All citrus have a shallow root system, so ensure there is a thick layer of mulch, such as straw, but leave it several centimetres away from the trunk to prevent rot and disease. When picking fruit, cut back several centimetres to encourage fruiting wood for the following season. Grapefruit needs small applications of fertiliser

four times a year. However, don't feed them when they are in flower, as this will only encourage leaves rather than fruit.

Growing a tree from seed can be done, but be prepared to wait five or more years to enjoy the fruit. A more certain and quicker way is to buy a grafted tree. The warmer the climate, the sweeter the fruit.

## Hibiscus

**H**ibiscus flowers last for one day, but what a day. In a short twelve hours they epitomise all that is sultry, tropical and romantic — even in your own backyard. The Tahitian custom is to promote your availability by wearing a hibiscus flower behind your right ear, or notify you are no longer in the market, or just over it, when the flower is placed behind your left ear.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Fairly easy
Part used	Calyx (the whorl of sepals underneath and cupping the petals)
Goes well with	For coughs: honey, thyme or licorice; for high blood pressure: garlic
Also known as	<i>Hibiscus sabdariffa</i> , roselle, red sorrel
How to use	Tea, tincture, capsule, food
Climate zones	1–5

Companion plants	No
Pot	Yes

**MEDICINAL USES**

Hibiscus has a long tradition of being used in herbal teas, where it provides a deep burgundy colour, citrus taste and fruity aroma. High in vitamin C and various bioflavonoids and also antibacterial, hibiscus is recommended for coughs and colds and boosting the immune system. The Sudanese make a tea from hibiscus called Karkade, which they drink to cool down, as hibiscus has a refrigerant effect similar to peppermint. It is mildly laxative. Recent studies have shown that hibiscus flowers lower blood pressure, both systolic and diastolic readings, by more than 10 per cent. A pretty pill to swallow.

**GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* High blood pressure, coughs, colds, constipation, helps protect against cancer and heart disease.

**HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Tea, tincture, capsule (see pages 33–36). The petals can be used in salads.

**GROWING YOUR OWN**

The hibiscus species traditionally used for herbal teas, and the one studied medicinally, is *Hibiscus sabdariffa*, also known as roselle. Unlike showier members of the family, its flower is white to pale yellow with a red spot at the base of each petal. Once the petals drop, the remaining deep red calyx is collected and dried. The calyx is a cup-like whorl of sepals that cover the flower bud before it opens and then remain at the base of the flower afterwards. Hibiscus are tropical shrubs, and do best in warm, temperate climates. Plant

in full sun in rich, well-drained soil. Cut back after collecting the flowers and calyxes to promote more flowers.

## Holy basil

Native to India, holy basil is highly regarded in the Ayurvedic tradition of medicine. It is also considered a sacred herb and is included as part of wedding ceremonies. As a culinary herb, holy basil has a stronger, sharper taste than its Mediterranean cousin (sweet basil), with clove-like overtones.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Leaf
Goes well with	For cold remedy: withania, Siberian ginseng, astragalus, ginger or echinacea
Also known as	<i>Ocimum tenuiflorum</i> , <i>O. sanctum</i> , tulsi, sacred basil
How to use	Tea, tincture, capsule, dried as a toothpaste
Climate zones	1–6 (frost tender)
Companion plants	Tomatoes, capsicum, eggplant, parsley, asparagus

Pot	Yes
-----	-----

### **MEDICINAL USES**

Holy basil is an adaptogen (see box below), a remedy which supports the body through stress, improving physical and mental performance and endurance. It's often used to enhance the immune system, and studies show that holy basil has antiviral and antibacterial action. It is useful as both a protection and treatment for coughs, colds, bronchitis and asthma.

Holy basil is beneficial in the treatment of gingivitis. Gingivitis is a common condition that involves red, swollen and inflamed gums, but is sometimes symptom-free, and detected only by your dentist. Not only does gingivitis increase the risk of losing teeth, there are proven links between gingivitis and heart disease. True. Gingivitis releases inflammatory chemicals into the bloodstream, including C-reactive protein (CRP) that sets up a cascade of reactions inside the arteries. While not everyone who has gingivitis suffers heart disease, more than 90 per cent of those with heart disease have gingivitis. Floss, exercise and eat holy basil.

### **GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Coughs, colds and flu, bronchitis, fever, lowered immunity, fatigue, low mood, gingivitis, helps to prevent heart disease.

*Topically:* Gingivitis.

**ADAPTOGENS**

Holy basil is an adaptogen, a term first coined in the late 1940s, when it was used to describe a medicine that can improve the body's response to stress. At that time, Russian scientists were carrying out research into the effect on the body of stressors, such as extreme physical and mental training, air and space travel, extremes of temperature and chronic illness. Their findings? Basically, not good. Professor Lazarev and his student Dr Israel Breckman researched herbs that reduced the effects of stress and increased physical and

mental endurance and performance. These herbs were called adaptogens and, apart from holy basil, include Siberian ginseng, licorice, Korean ginseng, schisandra, astragalus, gotu kola, rhodiola and withania.

## HOW TO USE IT

*Internally:* Add fresh leaves to salads, curries and stir-fries. (Dried holy basil is fine for medicine, but it doesn't have enough flavour for cooking.)

Tea, tincture, capsule (see pages 33–36).

*Topically:* To treat gingivitis, use dried and ground holy basil instead of (or together with) toothpaste.

## *For coughs and colds*

---

A popular Ayurvedic remedy for coughs and colds is an infusion of holy basil combined with ginger. To 2 cups of water add 20 holy basil leaves. Boil with 2 teaspoons of grated ginger, add honey, then keep boiling until reduced to one cup. Drink 3 cups daily.

## GROWING YOUR OWN

Holy basil, like all basil varieties, does best in a frost-free climate, with full sun. Its brittle stems need protection from the wind. Grow from seed. Basil leaves are a magnet for slugs and snails, so keep a close watch and remove them by hand. Holy basil wilts without regular committed watering, particularly if it is growing in a pot. Most leafy herbs and vegetables such as basil, rocket and lettuce will turn bitter and quite possibly resentful if they don't receive daily watering. Pinch the central tips to allow compact, bushy growth. Leaf production stalls on any stems with flowers, so pinch these off to keep a steady supply of leaves. Use a seaweed liquid fertiliser every couple of weeks.

## Honey

Fossils of bees show that they have existed on earth for 50 million years. The average honey bee collects nectar within two kilometres of the hive, makes 25 round trips each day, and carries a load of six-hundredths of a gram each time — that's around half its body weight. Busy bees indeed.

Bees collect nectar from various flowering plants, and fly it back to the hive where the nectar evaporates, leaving honey. The properties of the various plants give honey its distinctive smell (e.g. lavender), taste (e.g. leatherwood) and medicinal powers (e.g. tea tree, manuka).

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Fairly difficult
Goes well with	For wound healing: gotu kola or calendula
Also known as	<i>Apis mellifera</i>
How to use	Food, topically
Climate zones	1–6

### MEDICINAL USES

In the past few years there have been many studies into the wound-healing effects of honey. A layer of honey under a dressing is more effective than most normal antiseptic creams, and a fraction of the cost. The dressing is best kept on for at least twelve hours and can be left for three days.

Honey works differently from antibiotics, which directly attack the bacteria and their metabolic pathways. Rather, honey is hygroscopic, meaning that due to its high sugar content it draws moisture out of the environment (the wound), dehydrating the bacteria. The bugs literally die of thirst. In addition, honey has small amounts of hydrogen peroxide, which works like a traditional antibiotic. And, if the honey is gathered from a plant with antibiotic properties, such as tea tree or manuka, the honey may contain those antibiotic properties. The University of Bonn studies which prove the effectiveness of honey for wound healing used a standardised product created from honey made from such plants.

Although honey tastes as sweet or sweeter than sugar, it has a relatively low glycaemic index, meaning that it can be enjoyed by diabetics, and can be part of a weight-loss diet. Endurance athletes use honey for this reason, as it releases a steady flow of energy without a heavy weight into the tummy. Honey also contains fructooligosaccharides (FOS), a type of sugar that is not absorbed across the digestive tract. Although not used for energy, this is a happy circumstance as FOS is a prebiotic (food for good bugs in the intestine), particularly for our good friends *bifidus* and *acidophilus*.

#### **HOTEL BEES**

You don't have to live in the countryside to keep bees. The Fairmont Royal York Hotel in Canada's largest city, Toronto, keeps three beehives on the thirteenth floor, in addition to a fruit and vegetable patch to feed hotel guests. The hives are called the Honey Moon Suite, the Royal Sweet and the V.I. Bee Suite. Cute.

#### **GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Sore throat, energy during endurance sport.

*Topically:* Burns, wounds, ulcers, varicose ulcers, gingivitis, genital herpes.

*Caution:* Giving honey to babies under twelve months is not recommended. This is because, very rarely, honey contains the spores of the bacterium *Clostridium botulinum*, which causes botulism, a potentially fatal condition of paralysis and muscle weakness. Newborns have no immunity against this bacterium, whereas by twelve months the intestinal microflora are well equipped to deal with this threat.

### **HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Add to porridge; add to hot water and the juice of half a lemon (for sore throat).

*Topically:* Apply neat to wounds, and cover if necessary.

### **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Speak to an apiarist and/or do a beekeeping course. Beehives require dappled sunlight, access to nearby clean water, a dry location and plenty of flowers in the neighbourhood.

## Jerusalem artichoke

The magnificent, glowing sunflower above ground belies the knobbly, undistinguished little tuber beneath the soil. Grow Jerusalem artichokes for delicious food, pretty flowers and good medicine.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Tuber
Goes well with	For blood sugar control and diabetes prevention: cinnamon, aloe vera, nettles or apples; for immune support: echinacea or astragalus
Also known as	<i>Helianthus tuberosus</i> , sunflower artichoke, sunchode, sunchoke
How to use	Food
Climate zones	1–6
Companion	Corn, broad beans, cucumbers; dislikes

plants	potatoes
Pot	Yes

**MEDICINAL USES**

Jerusalem artichokes contain large amounts of inulin — a type of carbohydrate that the body cannot digest. It has absolutely no relation to insulin. Inulin has several beneficial effects on the body. Firstly, it helps stabilise blood sugar levels, making it an excellent food for preventing and treating diabetes. Inulin also stimulates the immune system. And lastly, as inulin is not digested, it travels down the intestine where it becomes food for the beneficial bacteria, including *Bifidobacterium*. Keeping our bowel flora healthy and happy is intrinsic to good health. The only downside to Jerusalem artichokes is that they have been implicated in flatulence. However, a little wind is but a small price to pay for such wonderful benefits.

**GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Bowel flora health, irritable bowel syndrome, constipation, immune support, helps guard against diabetes.

**WHAT'S IN A NAME?**

Jerusalem artichokes did not originate from Jerusalem; in fact they're Yankees. Italian migrants to the USA called the plant *girasole*, the Italian word for sunflower, which it resembles, and it's possible that 'Jerusalem' is a corruption of *girasole*. The artichoke part of the name was given by Samuel de Champlain, the French explorer, who first sampled these vegetables in the New World in the early 1600s — and reported back home that they tasted like artichokes. Which is odd, because they don't, except perhaps the sweetness of inulin is reminiscent of the sweetness of cynarin, a substance in globe artichokes.

**HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Freshly dug Jerusalem artichokes are crunchy and delicious raw in salads or as a snack. They can also be eaten in a similar way to potatoes, baked, stewed and in soup.

#### **THE GLYCAEMIC INDEX (GI)**

Jerusalem artichoke has a very low GI. The Glycaemic Index (GI) is a measure of how carbohydrates influence the body's blood sugar levels (also known as blood glucose levels). Every carbohydrate we eat, whether it originates from fruit, vegetable, grains or legumes, ultimately breaks down to glucose in the digestive system.

All cells use glucose for energy, especially the brain. As with blood pressure, body temperature and hormones, the body likes to keep blood sugar within acceptable levels — not too high and not too low. Too high and we are heading towards diabetes and, if left unchecked, ultimately a fatal coma. Too low, and we suffer hypoglycaemia and a likewise fatal coma. It is the job of the endocrine glands (including the pituitary gland, liver and pancreas) to keep blood sugar levels within these happy limits.

The ideal scenario is a slow and steady rise in blood sugar levels. The pituitary gland picks up an increase in blood sugar levels and sends a message to the pancreas, which secretes insulin into the bloodstream at a leisurely pace. Insulin can then encourage the molecules of sugar into various cells (thus lowering blood sugar levels) so they can use this for energy: heart cells for heart energy, toe cells for toe energy, and so on. Theoretically one will have eaten again before all the energy has been used, and the cycle continues.

Amazingly, the average amount of blood sugar circulating in the body at any one time is a measly 5 grams, or a teaspoon of sugar. It is extraordinary how adept the human body is at coping with the extreme fluctuations that occur, say, when someone drinks a can of soft drink — up to nine teaspoons of sugar. Nevertheless, this constant stretching of the endocrine friendship usually ends in tears as is evidenced by the current record levels of diabetes and obesity in Western countries, where the modern diet tends to have a very high GI.

The science of nutrition is so recent, and is still evolving. With each new piece of research, old beliefs get toppled. This is particularly the case with

carbohydrates. Around twenty years ago, carbohydrates were categorised as either 'simple' or 'complex'. Simple included sugar and honey; complex, the grains and legumes. Simple carbohydrates were believed to be absorbed very quickly with an influx of blood glucose, while complex carbohydrates took longer. Now, with research into the GI of carbohydrates, we know that some complex carbohydrates (such as mashed potatoes) affect blood glucose more than, say, table sugar. Although first discovered in the 1980s, this information has only in the last few years become mainstream and incorporated into dietary guidelines.

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Native to North America and a species of sunflower, Jerusalem artichokes were highly prized for food by the Native Americans. Once you have a crop of Jerusalem artichokes, they are difficult to get rid of. Just as happy to be ignored in a sunny spot, they will produce even more if compost, manure and blood and bone are added. Plant tubers straight into the ground in spring. Harvest in late summer when the leaves and flowers have died down.

## Kava

*I would like to be a glow-worm  
A glow-worm's never glum  
It's hard to be down-hearted  
When the sun shines out your bum*

*Author unknown*

Unfortunately, we can't all be happy-hearted glow-worms. Many people feel depressed and anxious at some time in their lives.

While the cause may be clear — too much stress at work mixed with too much stress at home — sorting things out through counselling or lifestyle changes usually takes time. In the meantime, life goes on, and a herb that can help with those awful feelings of anxiety comes in very handy. Kava is such a herb, and that's how it got the nickname of 'nature's valium'.

In 1768, while sailing through the Pacific islands, Captain James Cook noted the use of kava by the indigenous population, and visitors to Fiji and Samoa have enjoyed its relaxing effects ever since.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Fairly easy
Part used	Root
Goes well with	For anxiety, insomnia: valerian, passionflower or zizyphus

Also known as	<i>Piper methysticum</i>
How to use	Tea, tincture, capsule
Climate zones	1–5 (drought and frost tender)
Companion plants	No
Pot	No

## MEDICINAL USES

Double blind studies have shown that kava is as effective as tranquillising drugs without the side effects. It is approved in Germany as a non-prescription drug to reduce anxiety. Unlike prescription anti-anxiety drugs, kava has the unique ability to allow you to feel calm and peaceful — chilled even — while still mindful and alert. Kava acts gently on the nervous system without being addictive and won't leave you feeling groggy and 'out of it'.

Kava has anaesthetic properties, and is particularly effective when used as a gargle to relieve the pain of a sore throat. Pharmacological studies have shown that kava has soothing and sedating effects, precisely what is needed for anxiety and sleeplessness. It also has an antispasmodic effect on muscles, both skeletal muscles (for example, legs and neck) and smooth muscles (for example, arteries, bowel and womb). Kava will help in any situation where there is spasming or cramping of these muscles, for example tension headaches, tight neck and shoulders, period cramps, high blood pressure and irritable bowel syndrome.

Kava is occasionally claimed to be an aphrodisiac. While it does not contain the substances that affect hormones or circulation that some other herbal aphrodisiacs do (see box, page 104), kava does help decrease anxiety and increase relaxation. For many people, especially women, feeling stressed does nothing for their sex drive.

### **GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Anxiety, insomnia, stress, tense and cramping muscles, headaches due to tense muscles, bowel problems with a stress trigger, irritable bowel syndrome, constipation, diarrhoea, period cramps, high blood pressure, may may help with low libido if stress is the cause, sore throat.

*Caution:* Overdose of kava can result in an itchy skin rash, which disappears on discontinuing to take the herb. Several years ago kava was taken off the market when it was thought to cause liver damage. This has now been proven incorrect; nevertheless, patients with liver damage are recommended not to take this herb.

### **HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Tea, tincture, capsule (see pages 33–36). The authentic recipe for making kava involves chewing on the kava root until well macerated, then spitting it into a specially designed kava bowl. Luckily, it is not necessary to adhere to this procedure. The ground, dried kava can be made into a tea (see page 33); the ratio is usually a dessert spoon of kava to one cup of water. The mixture can be strained or not.

### **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Kava (*Piper methysticum*) is a slow-growing, vine-like shrub that is part of the pepper family. Native to the Polynesian islands, it grows best in tropical climates between 300 and 500 metres above sea level. *Piper methysticum* is not grown from seed as its flowering parts are usually sterile. The most common means of propagation is root division or cuttings. Kava requires deep, rich soil. When planting, allow at least 500 mm depth.

## Lavender

There is no smell quite as good as a field of lavender in bloom. (Except perhaps chocolate.) Lavender has been used as perfume, cosmetic, culinary herb and medicine for thousands of years. The word itself is derived from the Latin *lavare*, to wash or bathe, because lavender water is what the hygiene-conscious ancient Romans used to cleanse their bodies. Lavender's sharp, unique fragrance lifts the mood and soothes the soul to this day.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Flower
Goes well with	For sleep: California poppy, hops or valerian; for calm: kava or passionflower
Also known as	<i>Lavandula angustifolia</i> (formerly <i>officinalis</i> ), <i>English lavender</i>
How to use	Tea, tincture, capsule, essential oil, infused oil
Climate zones	3–6

Companion plants	Cabbages, roses
Pot	Yes

**MEDICINAL USES**

Both the essential oil and flowers are used medicinally. Small amounts of essential oil are applied externally for headaches, skin conditions and in massage lotions for stress and anxiety. Tea or tincture made from the flowers is taken internally for the same conditions. Linalool is the naturally occurring substance in lavender that is calming for the mind and body, as it acts as a tonic for anxiety, a gentle sedative and an antispasmodic for the muscles and bowel. The oil can be applied as an antiseptic and insect repellent.

**GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Headaches, depression, stress, anxiety, insomnia, colic, flatulence.

*Topically:* Using the essential oil, infused oil or cream: skin conditions, stings, burns, cuts, headaches, insect repellent. *Caution:* Essential lavender oil should never be taken internally. Avoid ingesting lavender during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

**HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Tea, tincture capsule (see pages 33–36).

*Topically:* The essential oil of lavender contains more of the active aromatic compound, linalool, than an infused oil. Adding a few drops of the essential oil (see page 39) to infused oil (see page 40) will enhance the benefits. Essential oil in an aromatherapy burner will help calm nerves. Neat oil can also help heal stings, bites and scratches, as can lavender cream (see page 41). Adding a few drops (essential oil) or a few teaspoons (infused oil) to massage oil or lotion is an excellent way to encourage full-body lavender healing.

Likewise, adding some to the bath before bed will improve sleep quality.

#### **ADDING LAVENDER'S FRAGRANCE TO CLOTHES**

Plant a clump of lavender bushes beside the clothes line so you can easily drape handkerchiefs and underwear over it, and they will get saturated with the scent of lavender. Cut twenty to thirty long stems of lavender flower, dry them, tie with purple ribbon and keep this posy in your linen and clothes drawers for yearlong fragrance as well as pest control.

#### **GROWING YOUR OWN**

The best lavender grows in well-drained, chalky or alkaline soils. Plant in full sun and prune hard each year to prevent the bush becoming unattractive and leggy, which it will do eventually and will need to be replaced every few years. However, make sure you don't cut into the old wood: prune to a couple of centimetres above. Lavender bushes need fertilising once a year and prefer to be under- rather than overwatered. Lavender attracts bees to the garden and repels moths and ants. Propagation is from cuttings.

## Lemon

In the past, no Australian backyard was complete without a Hills Hoist, a sprinkler for the kids to play under on hot summers' days, an inflatable blue plastic pool and a lemon tree. With the passage of time, backyards have changed. The plastic pool has been replaced with a water feature, and the sprinkler banned. But the lemon tree must stay, even if it's in a pot on a penthouse balcony.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Fruit
Goes well with	For colds and sore throats: honey in hot water
Also known as	<i>Citrus limon</i>
How to use	Salad dressings, lemon and hot water, lemon meringue pie
Climate zones	1–5, 6 in protected areas

Companion plants	No
Pot	Yes, dwarf varieties

**MEDICINAL USES**

Lemons contain a large quantity of vitamin C. Even before this vitamin was formally identified, lemon juice was used to treat and prevent scurvy in Royal Navy crews on long sea voyages when fresh food was limited and this fatal disease was rampant. Hot water with lemon juice and honey is a time-honoured remedy for colds and sore throats, best administered in front of a cosy fire in your jammies watching the television. Because of its vitamin C credentials, a squeeze of lemon juice over your meal greatly increases iron availability. Naturopaths recommend lemon juice to improve liver function. They say the sour taste of lemon helps a sluggish liver and digestive system, so lemons are excellent for those who suffer from constipation, difficulty processing fatty foods and any liver problems.

**GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Coughs, colds, constipation, sluggish liver, iron deficiency.

**HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* A healthy way to start the day is to drink the juice of half a lemon in a cup of hot water, adding honey if you like. Add lemon juice to salad dressings and marinades, and squeeze some over meals, especially if you are at risk of iron deficiency.

**A SQUEEZE OF LEMON**  
 Citric acid and ascorbic acid (vitamin C), both found in lemons, are antioxidants and prevent the oxidation or discolouration of foods: a squeeze of lemon juice over avocados, bananas or other food will prevent them

turning brown. Lemon juice is also a popular component of marinades, such as lemon juice, olive oil and rosemary for lamb. The acidity affects the protein bonds, causing the meat to become more tender, and in the case of seafood, can replace the cooking process.

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

It is difficult to grow a lemon tree from seed, so better to buy a grafted plant, choosing from varieties including Meyer and Lisbon. All varieties have similar medicinal properties. Lemon trees are very easy to grow, requiring little pruning. The roots are shallow and at risk of drying out without frequent watering, so will welcome a thick layer of mulch. Lemon trees require full sun. There are dwarf varieties available that will do fine in a pot if you do not have a large garden. Your lemon tree will reward you with lots of fruit if you ply it with a citrus fertiliser. However, don't feed when in flower, as this will only encourage more leaves than fruit. A common piece of gardening lore is that lemon trees thrive with the application of human urine. This is true: urine is rich in nitrogen, a nutritious element. However, there is a limit. Use discretion when pointing Percy, particularly with potted lemons.

In the first year, remove any lemons that start to grow. This will feel agonising, however, it truly is a case of tough love. Growing fruit takes a lot of energy. At this stage in a lemon tree's career, that energy is better focused on growing strong and robust, rather than supplying your G & T with a lemon slice. After all, you have another thirty years to enjoy your lemon tree.

## Lemon balm

English gardener and writer John Evelyn (1620–1706) pretty much summed up lemon balm: ‘[It] is sovereign for the brain, strengthening the memory, and powerfully chasing away melancholy’. And the sixteenth-century botanist Paracelsus approved of lemon balm’s ability to ‘make the heart merry’.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Leaf, flower (either or both)
Goes well with	For mood: St John’s wort; for digestion: chamomile or peppermint
Also known as	<i>Melissa officinalis</i> , balm, melissa
How to use	Tea, tincture, capsule, compress, cream
Climate zones	2–6, cooler parts of 1
Companion plants	Tomatoes

Pot	Yes
-----	-----

### **MEDICINAL USES**

The main actions of lemon balm are on the mind and the digestive system. Lemon balm improves mood as well as restoring a sense of calmness. Who can resist this winning combination? It also has a mildly sedative action, but won't affect daytime alertness. Studies have shown that lemon balm has a positive effect in those with mild to moderate Alzheimer's, helping cognitive function and reducing agitation.

Lemon balm tea is a well-established post-prandial beverage in Europe, helping to settle the tummy and smooth the digestive processes. It is what herbalists call a carminative, a herb that calms the gut wall and expedites the release — and prevents the production — of uncomfortable gas from the intestinal tract. Lemon balm is such a gentle and sweet-tasting herb it is perfect for children as well as adults.

Lemon balm will heal sores, and reduce the frequency of future attacks of the herpes virus. The herpes family of viruses includes cold sores, shingles, genital herpes and chickenpox.

### **GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Mild depression, irritability, insomnia, headaches, indigestion, flatulence, colic in babies, common cold and flu, poor attention, poor memory, fever, agitation in Alzheimer's.

*Topically:* Herpes virus, especially when applied topically to cold sores, shingles or genital herpes.

### **HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Lemon balm tastes sweet and fresh. Add the leaves and/or flowers to fruit salads, fruit cocktails or iced water.

Tea, tincture, capsule (see pages 33–36).

*Topically:* Compress (see page 37), cream (see page 41).

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

The word *Melissa* (*Melissa officinalis*) is derived from the Greek word for honey bee, and indeed the bees go crazy for lemon balm. Good for bees, good for your garden. A pretty and hardy addition to the garden, lemon balm has a heart-shaped lime-green leaf that smells fresh and citrusy as you brush past. It's a perennial, easily grown from seed, cuttings or root division, and is shade tolerant, preferring moist, well-drained soil. Harvest several times during the summer months.

## Lemon myrtle

A quintessential Australian bushwalking experience is to brush past a lemon myrtle tree and inhale the glorious citrus smell emanating from the leaves. Lemon myrtle is one of several plants in the *Backhousia* genus which is named after James Backhouse (1794–1869), who was a nurseryman, naturalist and Quaker missionary in Australia.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Leaf
Goes well with	Echinacea, ginger or lemon grass
Also known as	<i>Backhousia citriodora</i> , lemon iron wood, sweet verbena tree
How to use	Tea, tincture for infections, lemon myrtle cream or essential oil for skin infections and herpes lesions
Climate zones	1–5 (frost tender)

Companion plants	No
Pot	Yes

**MEDICINAL USES**

Lemon myrtle is extremely effective against all sorts of germs, including viruses (especially the herpes virus), bacteria (especially *Staphylococcus aureus*) and fungi (especially *Candida albicans*). This is mainly due to a natural chemical called citral, also present in lemon grass. These antibiotic qualities make lemon myrtle a valuable first-aid remedy for colds, bronchitis and herpes. Luckily it is also delicious, so it's no hardship to drink a cup of lemon myrtle tea to boost immunity and help reduce infections of all kinds. In addition, lemon myrtle is mildly sedative. Traditionally, Aboriginal people used lemon myrtle for arthritis.

**GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Common cold, influenza, bronchitis, shingles, cold sores, genital herpes, candidiasis (thrush), insomnia, building immunity, arthritis.

*Topically:* Skin infections, herpes lesions.

**HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Tea, tincture, capsule (see pages 33–36).

*Topically:* Cream (see page 41), essential oil (see page 39).

**GROWING YOUR OWN**

A long-lived, medium-sized tree, with strong lemon-scented leaves, lemon myrtle is part of the myrtle family, and native to coastal rainforests of NSW and Queensland. It is a rainforest tree, so needs plenty of water, and has spreading surface roots that require the protection of mulch. A lovely addition to your garden, lemon myrtle

provides a haven for birds, some shade under which to lie, and leaves with which to create a fragrant and medicinal brew. Propagation is from seed or cuttings.

## Licorice

A compound called glycyrrhizin gives licorice its overwhelmingly sweet taste. This natural constituent of licorice root is 150 times as sweet as sugar, but rather than cause a spike in blood sugar levels, licorice helps stabilise them. It's a great shame, but most licorice sold by confectioners contains little of this precious herb, instead consisting mainly of flour, sugar, treacle and molasses with a scant dash of licorice extract — if you're lucky.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Care needed
Part used	Root (rhizome)
Goes well with	For stress: withania or passionflower; for ulcers: calendula or goldenseal; for lung conditions: garlic
Also known as	<i>Glycyrrhiza glabra</i> ( <i>Liquiritia officinalis</i> )
How to use	Tea, tincture, capsule, cream
Climate zones	1–5 (frost tender)

Companion plants	No
Pot	Yes

**MEDICINAL USES**

Licorice is beloved by many herbal traditions: the Chinese, Ayurvedic and even the ancient Egyptians and Greeks took it to their hearts. Licorice has many beneficial actions in the body. One of the most impressive is its ability to support the adrenal glands in the fight against stress. Of the two hormones of stress, adrenaline and cortisol, cortisol is the most damaging for our long-term health, increasing the risk of cancer, diabetes, heart disease and osteoporosis. Licorice serves to minimise the secretion of cortisol. Nice.

The other effects of licorice include an ability to soothe and heal mucous membranes, particularly those which have been affected by ulcers, such as mouth ulcers, duodenal and other digestive ulcers. Other membranes licorice soothes and heals are the lungs, which is why licorice is often included in cough mixtures because it protects the inflamed mucous membranes of the lungs as well as acting as an expectorant by helping cough up phlegm.

There have been several studies that show it helps to reduce the pain and help healing of herpes sores, including shingles, chickenpox and genital herpes. It has a reputation as a mild laxative.

**GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Coughs, asthma, gastric and duodenal ulcers, gastritis, mouth ulcers, acute and long-term stress, polycystic ovarian syndrome, constipation, weaning off cortisone, lowered immunity.

*Topically:* Mouth ulcers.

*Caution:* Large doses of licorice can lead to a depletion of potassium, retention of sodium and increase in blood pressure, general weakness and even cardiac arrest. This is unlikely to occur by drinking a few cups of licorice tea daily, but check with your practitioner.

## **HOW TO USE**

*Internally:* Take licorice as a tea, tincture or capsule (see pages 33–36) or just chew on a dried licorice root. Delicious.

*Topically:* Cream (see page 41).

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

The licorice plant grows to 1 m with delicate fronds of green, purple and white flowers and smooth brown pods. But all the action is below ground; the plant has a strong taproot from which rhizomes 1–5 cm thick spread. These rhizomes are the licorice root used for medicine and, at least in the old days, confectionery. The root is yellow inside with brown bark externally that needs to be stripped away. Root development is best after three years. Licorice is a deciduous plant that is dormant during winter and needs to be well mulched. Propagation is easiest by root division.

## Meadowsweet

The name meadowsweet is derived from the word 'mead', an ancient alcoholic drink of fermented honey flavoured with different herbs such as meadowsweet. 'Bridewort' is another common name as, in Chaucer's day, its pretty white flowers were woven into garlands worn by a bride on her wedding day. After the vows, the fragrant leaves were strewn on banquet room floors.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Flower, leaf, stem (any or all)
Goes well with	For ulceration, reflux: licorice or peppermint; for arthritis: ginger
Also known as	<i>Filipendula ulmaria</i> , queen of the meadow, bridewort
How to use	Tea, tincture, capsule, compress, cream
Climate zones	5, 6 (drought tender)
Companion	Will crowd out any competition

plants	
Pot	Yes

**MEDICINAL USES**

The anti-inflammatory and antacid actions of this soothing herb make it ideal for all kinds of digestive problems, from stomach ulcers to reflux. Meadowsweet contains salicylates, the same as aspirin, and is useful for relieving the pain of headaches and arthritis. Although aspirin and similar non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) do a great job, one nasty side effect is irritation and potential bleeding of the stomach. The beauty of meadowsweet is that it helps cure inflamed stomachs and digestive tracts rather than cause them, as in the case of long-term aspirin use.

**A WONDER DRUG IS BORN**

In 1897, a German chemist called Felix Hoffmann was looking for something to help his father’s rheumatism. He discovered a compound in meadowsweet that was pain-relieving. The compound was named acetylsalicylic acid. At that time, meadowsweet’s botanical name was *Spiraea*. The drug synthesised from the meadowsweet compound became commonly known as aspirin — the name came from the ‘a’ of acetylic acid and the ‘spir’ from *Spiraea*.

**GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Stomach ulcers, indigestion, heartburn, reflux, irritable bowel syndrome, diarrhoea, headaches, arthritis.

*Topically:* Arthritis.

*Caution:* Meadowsweet contains salicylates and should be avoided by anyone with a known salicylate sensitivity.

**HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* As a tea after meals; capsule, tincture (see pages 33–36).

*Topically:* Compress (see page 37), cream (see page 41), for arthritis.

### **GROWING YOUR OWN**

An English meadow herb, meadowsweet grows well around ponds and along riverbanks, anywhere that can supply moist, well-drained soil. Growing around 1–1.2 m high, meadowsweet has creamy white flowers that are a magnet to bees. Its dark green serrated leaves are fragrant, reminiscent of sweet almonds. Harvest the stems, leaves and flower heads just before all the petals have opened. It can be grown from seed, or very easily from root division; grow in full sun to semi-shade. Once established, the queen of the meadow fills out nicely, reducing the need to weed. In fact, so readily does meadowsweet spread, it will crowd out any competition.

## Nasturtium

The brightly coloured nasturtium flowers with their lotus-shaped leaves are guaranteed to brighten any garden or balcony. The peppery taste of the young leaves and soft-petalled flowers make a nutritional and visual statement in the salad bowl.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Flower, leaf (particularly young leaves) (either or both)
Goes well with	For infection: echinacea, calendula or garlic; for liver: St Mary's thistle or dandelion root
Also known as	<i>Tropaeolum majus</i>
How to use	Food, in salads and sandwiches; tea, tincture, cream
Climate zones	1–6 (frost tender)
Companion	Cabbages, broccoli, melons, cucumbers,

plants	pumpkins, potatoes, and around fruit trees
Pot	Yes

**MEDICINAL USES**

Mustard oil glycosides found in nasturtiums have several medicinal actions. They have a decongestant effect, relieving clogged noses, congested lungs and stuffed-up sinuses. There is also a marked antibiotic effect. The two together make a terrific team for treating respiratory tract congestion and infections, from the lungs up. And they look so pretty in a vase in the sickroom — you’ll feel better instantly. Mustard oil glycosides are also known to help the liver in its ability to process substances such as alcohol and fatty food; nasturtium is thus helpful for any liver conditions and also dodgy digestion. Nasturtiums have traditionally been used to improve circulation and for the topical treatment of rashes and dandruff.

Additionally, when eaten fresh, nasturtium leaves and flowers provide a significant amount of vitamin C.

**GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Bronchitis, colds, sinusitis, poor circulation, varicose veins, sluggish digestion and liver function, immune support.

*Topically:* Skin rashes, mild burns, dandruff.

**HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Probably the best way to add the goodness of nasturtiums to your diet is to toss a few petals and young leaves into salads and sandwiches.

Tea, tincture (see pages 33–34).

*Topically:* Cream (see page 41) or cool tea (see page 33).

**GROWING YOUR OWN**

Sprawling and colourful, nasturtiums give that homely English cottage garden feeling, even though they came originally from Peru. The trumpet-shaped flowers vary from deepest maroon to softest yellow, often on the same plant. Don't miss out on sucking the sweet nectar from the spur at the base of the flower. Once you have nasturtiums in your garden, you will have them for a long time as they are prolific growers and self-seed. They prefer well-drained soil — and the poorer the soil, the more prolific the flowers. It is highly recommended as a rockery plant — the nasturtium flowers and leaves will cascade over boulders.

Nasturtiums make excellent companion plants. Their strong scent is present in the air and soil, deterring aphids and other plant pests.

## Nettle

If you can get past the weed association, nettles make an excellent addition to your medicinal garden. Nettles have literally been interwoven in the fabric of civilisation: related to flax and hemp, they were traditionally used as a textile for clothing and the juice is still used as a vibrant green dye.

Nettles embody the homeopathic principle of ‘like cures like’, which proposes that the substance that creates a symptom, in this case nettle rash, can also cure that symptom. Applying nettle juice, cream or tea to nettle rash or any itchy rash will ease the symptoms immediately. *Urtica* is the homeopathic remedy equivalent, and it is also used for red, itchy and swollen skin conditions.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Leaf, root
Goes well with	For tonic: gotu kola; for arthritis: celery or ginger
Also known as	<i>Urtica dioica</i> , stinging nettle, common nettle
How to use	Food, tea, tincture, cream

Climate zones	1–6
Companion plants	Potatoes, fruit trees
Pot	Yes

## MEDICINAL USES

Nettle leaves are nutrient-dense and high in magnesium, chlorophyll, iron and silica. For hundreds of years they have been used to ‘strengthen the blood’ for those feeling weak or convalescing. Drinking nettle leaf tea helps reduce inflammation, particularly of eczema and arthritis. Nettles help in the excretion of uric acid from the body, good news for anyone suffering from gout. Possibly due to the high levels of silica, nettle leaf has been used to improve hair and nail strength.

It has been found to lower blood sugar levels, which is helpful for those wishing to avoid diabetes. Nettles are known as a galactagogue — a substance that helps the production and secretion of breast milk. Other galactagogues include St Mary’s thistle, fennel seeds, dill seeds, fenugreek and raspberry leaf. Nettle root is recommended for prostate and bladder problems.

## GOOD FOR

### Leaf

*Internally:* Gout, eczema, arthritis, acne, dandruff, hair loss, anaemia, weak nails, brittle or weak hair, increasing milk production, type 2 diabetes.

*Topically:* Burns, eczema, rashes; dandruff, hair loss and general hair health (see recipe, page 186).

### Root

*Internally:* Cystitis, benign prostatic hyperplasia, prostatitis.

## HOW TO USE IT

### Leaf

*Internally:* Nettles make a nutritious and virtuous vegetable dish similar to spinach and can be sautéed, steamed or boiled. They are delicious with poached eggs. Heating inactivates the painful stings; just handle the leaves with care before they reach the cooking pot. Make sure to use only the young nettle tops — 10–15 cm high — as leaves older and larger than this are gritty and tough.

Tea, tincture (see pages 33–34).

*Topically:* Applied to the skin as a wash or compress, nettle leaf tincture or tisane (see pages 33–34) helps heal burns, eczema and any itchy or sore rashes. **Root**

*Internally:* Tea, tincture (see pages 33–34).

### ***Nettle soup***

---

*1 tablespoon olive oil*

*1 brown onion, chopped*

*500 g potatoes, cooked, peeled and diced*

*250 g tender young nettles*

*1 L chicken or vegetable stock (or water)*

*Salt, pepper and ground nutmeg, to taste*

Heat the oil in a saucepan, add onion and sauté until golden. Add potatoes and nettles, stir for 3 minutes. Add the stock or water and simmer for 15 minutes. Puree in food blender. Season with salt, pepper and ground nutmeg. Reheat. Serve with a generous dollop of natural yoghurt.

### ***Nettle hair and scalp lotion***

---

*1 large bunch young nettle leaves (or 1 cup dried)*

*1 L water*

*50 mL apple cider vinegar*

*1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar (extra)*

Combine the first three ingredients and simmer for an hour, or until the liquid has been reduced by half. Cool and strain, then add the extra vinegar. Keep in the fridge and use as a final rinse after washing hair. Use for dandruff, hair loss, and to promote glossy, healthy hair; best for brunettes.

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

As is the case with many weeds, growing nettles is as easy as falling off a log. Nettles are a weed in most states and they easily get away, so keep an eye on them. Any spare nettles will be gratefully accepted by the compost bin where they will break down, releasing all those lovely nutrients. Nettles grow well from seed or root division. They grow 0.5–2 m high.

Caution needs to be applied when picking nettles. The whole plant is covered in fine down and stinging hairs, which have a hollow spine tipped with a needle-like spike made strong by silica. The stings contain formic acid and histamine, both formidable pain activators. Use garden gloves to ‘grasp the nettle’! Still wearing gloves, strip the leaves from the stalk (there are clever rose thorn doovers perfect for this task). If you do manage to get stung — and to be fair that is what the stinging nettle is good at — don’t rinse with water as this will only make the stinging worse. Instead, rub with mint leaves, dock leaves or banana skin.

## Olive

Olive trees are the archetypal plant of the Mediterranean, redolent of the positive aspects of ancient Greece and Rome.

Garlands of olive leaves crowned the victors at the Olympic Games; wreaths were also worn at Roman games; and, of course, the ubiquitous symbol of peace, the olive branch, derives from the Greek tradition.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Leaf, oil
Goes well with	Leaf: garlic, calendula or echinacea for colds and immune support; oil: avocado for dry skin
Also known as	<i>Olea europaea</i>
How to use	Oil: use in diet, dressings, cooking; leaf: tea, tincture, capsule
Climate zones	3–6

Companion plants	Walnuts, onions, garlic
Pot	Yes

**MEDICINAL USES**

**Oil**

In the 1990s, olive oil morphed from humble vegetable oil to medicinal überoil after a large study conducted by Harvard University’s School of Public Health showed people living (and eating!) in southern Italy, coastal Greece and Crete were healthier than their American counterparts. In particular, these folk suffered substantially less cancer, heart disease, Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s disease. Various theories were put forward, with one food standing out as the keystone to the Mediterranean diet ... olive oil. Other positive attributes of the Mediterranean diet include less reliance on animal protein and more on legumes and nuts, and an emphasis on unprocessed food, vegetables and fruit. Olive oil came out smelling like a rose.

Since that study, more research has been done on the role of fats; we now know that the *quality* or type of fat in our diet is every bit as important as the *quantity* of fat. Olive oil contains up to 70 per cent oleic acid, a monounsaturated fatty acid. Monounsaturated fats help lower cholesterol levels, reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease and may help protect against various cancers, including breast and colorectal cancer.

The Romans were particularly fond of being massaged with olive oil after bathing. In addition to being extremely moisturising, olive oil helps treat dry skin, eczema, cradle cap, nappy rash and mild burns.

**VIRGINS AND EXTRA VIRGINS**

'Virgin' indicates that the oil has been obtained through physical means, usually by pressing. Roman stone mills 2000 years old are still in use, although steel mills are more commonly used. It also means that chemicals have not been added to the process. 'Extra virgin' indicates an acid level lower than 1 per cent, a desirable characteristic. The greener and cloudier the olive oil, the more antioxidants and other goodies it contains.

## **Leaf**

Olive leaf has traditionally been used to lower blood pressure. However, relatively recent research has shown that olive leaf contains substances including oleuropein that have antiviral and antibacterial properties, and which also help to lower fevers. Studies show that olive leaf may be useful in the treatment of colds and flu, and the herpes virus.

## **GOOD FOR**

### **Oil**

*Internally:* Helps guard against heart disease and some cancers, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, mild constipation.

*Topically:* Dry skin, eczema, cradle cap, nappy rash, mild burns.

### **Leaf**

*Internally:* High blood pressure, flu, colds, fever, genital herpes, cold sores, shingles.

## **HOW TO USE IT**

### **Leaf**

*Internally:* Use the leaves fresh or dried. Tea, tincture, capsule (see pages 33–36).

### **Oil**

Although pressing oil from olives is a simple mechanical process, it requires substantial machinery and is outside the realm of the home gardener. However, many rural communities are banding together to form olive oil co-ops.

*Internally:* Add the oil to salads and cooking.

*Topically:* Olive oil makes a lovely base for infused oils (see page 40) and can be added to poultices (see page 38). Or just massage neat, or with a few drops of essential oil such as lavender or neroli.

#### **CURING OLIVES**

Eating an olive straight from the tree is an unforgettable experience. A bad one. They are extremely bitter, and need to be cured before eating. Olives can be cured in water, brine, salt or oil — all of which can be done at home.

Harvest your olives. Ensure they are not damaged. Wash them. Using a mallet, softly crush each olive, taking care not to crush the seed. Place olives in a bucket and cover with fresh water. Drain the olives and replace water twice a day for six to nine days. In the latter days, taste for bitterness. Once the bitterness has been removed, place the olives in brine. (Brine is made from one part sea salt to ten parts water.) Then decant into smaller jars for storage and gift giving. You could add bay leaves, peppercorns, lemon peel and thyme to the brine.

#### **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Olive trees are easy to grow, requiring well-drained soil and lots of sun. They can be grown in large pots. A small evergreen tree growing up to 10 m high, the olive is suitable for most backyards. Apart from the fruit, the elegant, elongated, silvery-green leaves are the olive tree's finest feature. Olive wood makes beautiful furniture. It takes up to two years for an olive tree to bear fruit, and it will then crop every two years. Olive trees can be productive for hundreds of years. Green and black olives are found on the same tree, it's just a question of maturity. The more mature, the darker purple the fruit. Popular varieties include Kalamata, Ligurian and Verdale. All are helpful medicinally.

## Onion

The multilayered onion bulb is the mainstay of many cuisines. Instead of the usual starch, onions store energy in the form of fructose which when cooked becomes pleasantly sweet and almost meaty, a taste Japanese refer to as 'umami'.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Fairly easy
Part used	Bulb
Goes well with	For colds and flu and heart disease: garlic
<i>Also known as</i>	<i>Allium cepa</i>
How to use	Food, poultice, cough remedy
Climate zones	1-6
Companion plants	Carrots, chamomile, brassicas, peas, beans
Pot	No

### MEDICINAL USES

A member of the *Allium* genus, onions also possess the antibacterial sulphur-containing compounds so powerful in garlic, only in lesser concentrations. Regular consumption of raw and cooked onions will assist the immune system in staving off infection. Onions may also have anticancer and anti-inflammatory actions as well as helping to prevent atherosclerosis. Onions are often recommended in treating and helping to prevent asthma, as the thiosulfinates (more sulphur-containing compounds) reduce bronchial constriction, the physiological action triggering asthma.

Also like garlic, onions are mucolytic, meaning they reduce the viscosity or thickness of mucus, allowing the mucus to be blown out of the nose or coughed up from the lungs more easily. Mucus is produced when mucous membranes are inflamed by infection or irritation; excreting mucus is the body's way of eliminating pathogens, and onions facilitate this process.

The same molecules responsible for helping asthma and guarding against cancer also make us cry. When onions are cut or crushed, sulphurous gas escapes, attaching itself to nerve endings in the eye and nose. The crying factor can be minimised by chilling onions before chopping.

### **GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Asthma, colds, coughs, guarding against heart disease and cancer.

*Topically:* Wounds, insect bites.

### **HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Use onions cooked and raw in your diet.

Cough remedy (see recipe, page 194).

*Topically:* Poultice (see page 38) for wounds, insect bites.

### ***Onion cough remedy***

---

Slice one red onion. Spread each slice with honey. Stick the slices back together and place the reconstituted onion on a saucer in a warm place overnight. Next morning, take two teaspoons of the resulting fluid. If your cough is worse at night, prepare your onion in the morning. You can use white or brown onions for this recipe, however red onions contain extra bioflavonoids which may benefit the cough.

### **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Onions are sown in the cool of winter to be harvested in the warmer months. The seeds, which are black and angular, are best planted in seed-raising mix, then transplanted when 8 cm tall. To plant seedlings, make a small trench, lay them sideways, cover the roots with soil and, within a week, they will be growing upright. Onions require regular watering. Thanks to their strong smell, onions are generally pest-free. However, they can be troubled by powdery mildew. Onions are ready to harvest when the tops look yellow and start to dry out. Once pulled from the soil, dry the onion bulbs in the sun to prevent mildew growth when stored.

## Papaya

The fast-growing papaya tree makes any garden look tropical. If a Caribbean holiday is not in your budget, pretend. Put on your swimmers, rub on a little sunscreen, invite a few mozzies and enjoy a slice of papaya with a squeeze of lime juice. Dream on.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Flesh, seed (either or both)
Goes well with	To guard against cancer and heart disease: berries and other antioxidant-rich fruit
Also known as	<i>Carica papaya</i> (also incorrectly called pawpaw, papaw)
How to use	Food
Climate zones	1–5 (frost sensitive)
Companion plants	No

Pot	No
-----	----

### **MEDICINAL USES**

Ripe papaya is an amazingly rich source of vitamin C and the carotenoid pigments betacarotene and lycopene (in the redder varieties). This makes it a fruit valuable for boosting the immune system, and useful in helping to prevent cancers. For example, lycopene shows particular promise against prostate cancer. Papaya juice may help lower blood pressure.

Another substance found in papaya that is used medicinally and in cooking is papain. Papain is a protease, an enzyme that breaks down protein. The less ripe the fruit is, the more papain it contains. For this reason, in the tropical countries where papayas thrive, their fruit and leaves are often used to tenderise meat and fish before or instead of cooking. Papain benefits those with poor digestion with symptoms including bloating and flatulence. Eating a slice of papaya with meals may help digestion. Papain also helps reduce bruising and inflammation around joints, including arthritis.

The inner black seeds are edible and can be used as a sharp-tasting condiment. They contain mustard compounds (glucosinolates) common to the cabbage and onion family, with similar anticancer benefits. The seeds help treat constipation too, and will rid the body of intestinal parasites.

### **GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Use the fruit for bloating, slow digestion, guarding against cancer, constipation, indigestion, high blood pressure, bruising, arthritis. Use the seeds for intestinal parasites, constipation.

### **HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Juice, in fruit salads, swallow seeds with papaya or other juice.

### **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Native to Central America, the papaya prefers warm climates with plenty of summer rainfall. However, it will survive in cooler climates if well protected. The plants are easy to grow from seed. The papaya tree may be either dioecious (usually the yellow-fruited papayas) or bisexual (red-fruited papayas). It is not until flowering that you are certain which sex the papaya is, so it's wise to grow several to ensure a female tree is among your crop, as these are the only ones to fruit. They take just over one year to bear fruit and last from two to five years before you need to replant.

Ripening begins at the centre and extends outwards, which makes it a bit tricky to decide when the fruit is ready. However, the best time to slice one open is when the end nearest the stem is yellow and soft to the touch.

#### **PAPAYA OR PAWPAW?**

The papaya is often incorrectly called pawpaw or papaw. However, the pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*) is a tree of non-tropical North American origin, closely related to the custard apple, chermoya and soursop. Internally the fruit looks like a custard apple, with large brown seeds dispersed through its creamy white flesh.

## Parsley

Two main varieties of parsley are cultivated, curly-leafed (*Petroselinum crispum*) and flat-leafed or Italian parsley (*P. neapolitanum*). The flat-leafed is a little milder in flavour than the curly-leafed, but both are equally good for you. *Petroselinum* is derived from two Greek words: *petros* meaning rock, and *selinon*, meaning celery. If you close your eyes, and rub some parsley leaves between your fingers, the smell is reminiscent of celery, to which it is related.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Leaf, seed, root (any or all)
Goes well with	For kidneys: dandelion leaves or cleavers
Also known as	<i>Petroselinum crispum</i> (curly-leafed parsley); <i>P. neapolitanum</i> (flat-leafed, or Italian, parsley)
How to use	Food, juice, tea
Climate zones	1–6

Companion plants	Roses, tomatoes, asparagus, chives; dislikes mint
Pot	Yes

**MEDICINAL USES**

High in vitamin C, iron, magnesium, calcium, vitamin A and chlorophyll, parsley is like a herbal multivitamin and makes an ideal daily addition to your diet. Chlorophyll is the green pigment in plants responsible for photosynthesis. Although not widely studied so far, it appears that chlorophyll may help enzymes in the liver to detoxify impurities in the body. Chlorophyll helps reduce odour, whether body odour or bad breath. Including parsley leaves in the diet (or adding to fresh juices) of a new mother will increase production of breast milk. Herbalists know and love parsley for its beneficial effect on the urinary system, which includes the kidneys and bladder. Galen, or Aelius Galenus, a first-century Roman philosopher and physician, claimed parsley ‘provoketh the urine mightily’.

**PARSLEY FOLKLORE**

The ancient Greeks dedicated parsley to Persephone, dual goddess of spring and the underworld. By medieval times, parsley was still identified with the dark side. Virgins were warned against picking parsley for fear of being impregnated by Satan. However, any evil in the plant was said to be neutralised if parsley seeds were sown under a waxing moon on Good Friday. Given these stringent conditions, it’s surprising any parsley has survived to this day. Another piece of folklore I’m fond of says, ‘Where parsley thrives, the missus is master.’

**GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Bad breath, body odour, cystitis, oedema (fluid retention), kidney problems, anaemia, flatulence, increasing breast milk, arthritis.

*Caution:* Excessive amounts of parsley seed or parsley oil are not recommended during pregnancy or in cases of kidney disease; however, eating parsley leaves as part of a regular diet is absolutely fine.

## **HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Use parsley liberally in your diet: add it to soups, casseroles, salads and sandwiches. Parsley is an excellent addition to fresh vegetable juices. Parsley tea (see page 33) can be made by boiling one cup of parsley in 1 litre of water until reduced by half. Use chopped parsley the same day, because if it is kept longer, it will become yellow and slimy. Parsley can be stored in bunches in the fridge, with the stalks resting in a little water. Best of all, pick as you need. Although parsley can be dried (see pages 31–32), it loses much of its colour and flavour.

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Parsley grows as well in pots and window boxes as in the garden. Parsley is a biennial. Sow in spring and summer. The seeds are known to take a long while (up to four weeks) to germinate but once parsley takes hold, it grows from every nook and cranny. To speed up germination, soak the seeds in lukewarm water for twenty-four hours before planting.

Parsley thrives in a moist environment and does well in either full sun or dappled shade. Keep it well watered or the leaves will become bitter. You will find fewer weeds growing in a garden containing parsley due to the release of a natural chemical compound, furanocoumarin, found in the seed coat. Pick parsley leaves regularly from the outside in, to promote growth, but allow a couple of plants to go to seed, and you will be rewarded with a longer parsley season. Bees love parsley and aphids don't, which makes parsley a perfect 'companion' plant, especially alongside tomatoes, asparagus, chives and roses. For a dramatic display, if you have the room, plant a thick border of parsley around a bed of marigolds.

## Gremolata

---

*1 tablespoon parsley, finely chopped*

*1 clove garlic, finely chopped*

*Zest of 1 lemon*

Gremolata is a traditional Italian accompaniment for slow-cooked meat dishes such as osso buco. It adds a feisty freshness and is a cinch to make. The lemon zest makes it perfect also for seafood. Simply mix together the parsley (the flat-leafed parsley is most often used for this recipe), the garlic and the grated lemon zest.

## Passionflower

The passionflower, flower of the passionfruit vine, was named in the sixteenth century by Spanish conquistadors in Peru, who saw the flowers as symbolic of the passion of Christ, and therefore a sign of Christ's approval of their efforts. No doubt the locals felt differently.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Leaf, flower (either or both)
Goes well with	For bowel or period pain: ginger; for sleep: valerian, California poppy or hops
Also known as	<i>Passiflora incarnata</i>
How to use	Tea, tincture, capsule, compress, poultice
Climate zones	1–6 (frost tender)
Companion plants	No

Pot	Yes
-----	-----

### **MEDICINAL USES**

Passionflower is often used for insomnia, whether difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep or early awakening. It needs to be taken nightly for at least two weeks for best effect. Poor sleep becomes habitual, and patience needs to be practised for the body to break this unhealthy pattern. In addition to its soporific powers, passionflower helps reduce anxiety. One interesting study showed that passionflower reduces anxiety levels prior to outpatient surgery. Passionflower has been favourably compared to anti-anxiety medication including benzodiazepines, but without the debilitating side effects or drowsiness. Passionflower is also antispasmodic, good for painful periods and bowel spasms.

### **GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Insomnia, anxiety, emotional and physical tension, irritable bowel syndrome, painful periods, twitching muscles, stomach pains of emotional origin, headaches, heart palpitations, high blood pressure, and irritability with long illness.

*Topically:* Abdominal pain from irritable bowel syndrome or period pain.

### **HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Tea, tincture, capsule (see pages 33–36).

*Topically:* Compress or poultice (see pages 37–38) for abdominal pain from irritable bowel syndrome or period pain.

### **GROWING YOUR OWN**

An easy-to-grow vine with glossy bright-green leaves and spectacular flowers, the passionflower can grow up to 4 m in one season. With a relatively small root system, the passionflower will grow well in pots. They prefer sandy, free-draining soil and will tolerate full sun, partial shade and the occasional frost. The fruit is

smaller and less tasty than the related fruit-bearing *Passiflora edulis*. Passionflower can propagate from seed, although it is recommended to scrape seeds with sandpaper (scarify) and soak overnight in warm water before planting. Another thing to recommend buying an established plant, or propagate from cuttings, is that plants grown from seed can take several years to flower — if at all.

## Peppermint

Uplifting taste, refreshing fragrance, wonderful tummy tonic ... and simple to grow: What's not to love about peppermint?

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Leaf
Goes well with	For flatulence or irritable bowel syndrome: ginger or chamomile; for headaches: rosemary; for hot flushes: sage
Also known as	<i>Mentha x piperita</i>
How to use	Tea, tincture, compress, essential oil
Climate zones	1-6
Companion plants	Cabbages, tomatoes; dislikes parsley
Pot	Yes

---

## MEDICINAL USES

Peppermint relieves spasm and pain in all parts of the digestive tract. Studies have shown that it relaxes the gastrooesophageal sphincter, the tight ring of muscle between the stomach and oesophagus. This explains why peppermint eases heartburn and reflux. The antispasmodic action makes peppermint the ideal remedy for babies' colic, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), bloating, flatulence and the painful condition known as biliary colic. In fact, peppermint oil capsules are widely prescribed for IBS. Peppermint is also excellent for reducing nausea. It is mildly sedating which makes it an excellent relaxant for stress and also helpful for sleep difficulties. Cooling in summer, peppermint is also effective for relieving the dreaded hot sweats of menopause. The menthol in peppermint tricks the nerve endings into believing that the body is up to 7°C cooler than it actually is. When inhaled, the essential oil has a drying effect on mucous membranes, which explains why it is so helpful in treating coughs and colds.

## GOOD FOR

*Internally:* Headaches, nervousness, nausea, flatulence, diarrhoea, irritable bowel syndrome, biliary colic, colic, reflux, hot flushes, insomnia, vertigo, colds, coughs. *Topically:* Coughs, asthma, headaches, hot flushes.

## HOW TO USE IT

*Internally:* Peppermint leaves can be used fresh or dried. For digestive problems, drink a cup of peppermint tea after meals. For baby, add a teaspoon of peppermint tea to water or juice in the feeding bottle.

Tincture, capsule (see pages 33–36).

*Topically:* For hot flushes, make a footbath (see page 33), or compress (see page 37) applied to the throat and neck; add peppermint essential oil for extra effect. For headache, apply a

compress to the neck, or rub in a drop of peppermint oil to the temples. For cough and asthma, add a few drops of peppermint oil to a vaporiser or bowl of hot water and inhale. Do not take essential oil internally.

### **GROWING YOUR OWN**

While there are many varieties of mint, including spearmint, applemint and even chocolate mint, peppermint is the one prescribed for medicine. The variety most highly prized is known as Black Mitcham, with a mass of glossy purply black leaves. Peppermint, like all mints, is a megalomaniac. Give it an inch of garden, and it will take a mile. So containment is everything. If you have the room, give over an entire garden bed to this delicious, fragrant herb. Harvest the leaves as regularly and often as you can, and peppermint will reward you with new and vigorous growth. Being a hybrid, the seeds are sterile, however peppermint propagates readily from root division or stems. It prefers moist soil, but can tolerate a bit of dryness. It will die down in cold winters, but re-establish once warm times return.

## Pomegranate

**T**ough-skinned spherical orbs filled with juicy red seeds, pomegranates, originating in the Middle East, have special significance in various cultures and religions, often representing fertility, birth and immortal life. The fruit is mentioned in the Koran, Torah and Bible; it is also one of the three blessed fruits of Buddha.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Fruit
Goes well with	As a mouthwash for gum disease and ulcers: thyme; for sore throats: calendula or echinacea
Also known as	<i>Punica granatum</i> , Lybian or Carthaginian apple
How to use	Juice, fruit
Climate zones	1–6

Companion plants	No
Pot	Yes

**MEDICINAL USES**

The pomegranate has traditionally been used as a dessert fruit and a thirst-quenching juice. However, it has also been used for medicine. Its slightly astringent nature makes a diluted juice effective for helping to relieve diarrhoea. It also has antimicrobial properties, making it an effective mouthwash for gum disease and mouth ulcers, and gargle for sore throats.

Research in 2008 found an impressive amount of antioxidants in the fruit. In particular, punicalagin, a type of polyphenol. Such antioxidants are known to help guard against cancer and heart disease. Other studies showed a lowering of blood pressure, and also possibly helping erectile dysfunction.

**GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Guards against cancer and heart disease, high blood pressure, erectile dysfunction (possibly).

*Topically:* Gum disease, mouth ulcers, sore throat, tonsillitis, pharyngitis.

**HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Juice (for high antioxidants).

*Topically:* Use the juice as a mouthwash.

There is an art to enjoying the delicious fruit of the pomegranate. The hurdle is the ridiculous amount of seeds. A Jewish saying claims there are 613 seeds in each pomegranate, the same as the number of commandments in the Torah. The trick is to separate the bitter seeds from the sweet pulp that envelops them. The seeds look so pretty they are often used as a garnish in salads and desserts. There are

special juicers for pomegranates, although you can do a fairly good job with a citrus juicer and a light touch, or squeeze through a colander.

## **Grenadine cordial**

---

Combine equal parts pomegranate juice and sugar. Mix, stand for 24 hours. Bring to the boil and simmer for a short while until thickened. Pour into sterilised jars, and store in fridge. Mix 1:5 with iced water.

## **Grenadine and gin cocktail**

---

Mix juice of 8 fresh pomegranates, 2 lemons and 2 oranges. Add equal quantity of water and a dash of gin.

### **GROWING YOUR OWN**

A tough and hardy shrub, the pomegranate thrives in dry and sunny conditions, perfect for the Australian climate. It grows up to 5 m high and makes an attractive garden plant with dark-green, shiny leaves, tangerine-coloured flowers and distinctive pink fruit which grow to the size of a tennis ball.

## Potato

Native to South America, potatoes became a staple of the diets of the Irish, and Central and Eastern Europeans. Today China is the largest producer and consumer of potatoes. Although mainly eaten as food, the humble spud can also be used medicinally.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Fairly easy
Part used	Root
Goes well with	For inflammation and ulceration of gastrointestinal tract: cabbage, licorice or goldenseal
Also known as	<i>Solanum tuberosum</i> , <i>spud</i>
How to use	Juice, food, warm poultice
Climate zones	1–6
Companion plants	Calendula, nasturtiums, green beans, broad beans, cucumbers, horseradish, peas; dislikes

	sunflowers, Jerusalem artichokes, pumpkins, apples
Pot	Yes — very large

## MEDICINAL USES

Cooked potatoes make a safe, comforting food for symptom relief of inflamed stomachs and intestines, whereas the raw potato juice will actually help to heal any inflammation or ulceration of the digestive tract, particularly if combined with raw cabbage. Raw potato (and cabbage) juice will help pretty much any inflamed condition of the entire gastrointestinal tract from mouth to anus, including mouth ulcers, oesophagitis, reflux, stomach ulcers, Crohn's disease and anal fissures. Studies have shown that potatoes increase CCK (cholecystokinin), a natural chemical that increases satiety, our sense of feeling full. This can be useful for people with a tendency to overeat.

Externally, warm potato poultices are effective for reducing pain and inflammation — welcome relief from the pain of arthritis or gout. Also useful for 'drawing out' boils and carbuncles.

## GOOD FOR

*Internally:* Mouth and stomach ulcers, oesophagitis, reflux, anal fissures, gastritis, ulcerative colitis, reducing appetite.

*Topically:* Boils, arthritis, gout.

## HOW TO USE IT

*Internally:* Steam, bake or boil potatoes with the skin on, as many nutrients are contained within and just under the skin. However, if the bowel condition is extremely inflamed, it's best to cook without skin. The potatoes can be eaten mashed or cut up, or contained in a meal such as a casserole.

*Juice:* Peel the potatoes before juicing. Combined with raw cabbage, the juice will increase its effectiveness, and raw carrot

juice will make it more palatable. Ratio of 1 part potato: 1 part cabbage: 1 part carrot.

*Topically:* A potato poultice is easy to make (see page 38). Simply mash cooked potatoes (omit the butter and cream of really delicious mashed potatoes). While bearably hot, place on the muslin, and create a parcel. Place on the affected part, then wrap with plastic wrap, and cover with a towel. Leave for 20 minutes.

### **GREEN MEANS POISON**

Potatoes dislike sunlight. A lot. Exposure to light causes a green colouration on their skin, a sign of the presence of solanine, a poisonous alkaloid. This is a reminder that this most innocent of starchy tubers is in fact a member of the deadly nightshade family. Make sure all the green bits are removed before eating.

### **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Buy virus-free certified seed potatoes from the nursery. Choose your favourite eating varieties (for example, pink-skinned Desiree, yellow-fleshed Nicola, skinny Kipfler), as they will all offer the same medicinal benefit. Unless you are a big potato-eating family, form a co-op with friends, each buying a bag of a different variety, and take a few from each variety.

Cut up a potato into sections; each section should contain the 'eye' from where the plant will sprout. Potatoes can be grown in soil, wire net circles or even garbage bins. Layer a generous amount of compost or a variety of manure from sheep, cow and horse, then plant the whole spuds or the cutout eyes. Cover with more soil, then compost or manure, then a thick layer of straw. Fertilise with a potassium-rich fertiliser. As the stem and leaves of the potato poke up out of the straw, this is a sign for you to pile more straw on, to prevent light affecting the crop. Keep applying straw as long as the green stalks appear. The time to harvest is when all the leaves have died back. Water frequently until near harvest time, and then desist for the final week.

## Raspberry

Raspberries are dainty and delicious fruits which have a short season, in deep summer. However, it is the leaf which is used medicinally, in the care of pregnant women and their unborn babies.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Care needed
Part used	Leaf, fruit
Goes well with	For pregnancy: ginger or peppermint; for diarrhoea and heavy periods: ginger
Also known as	<i>Rubus idaeus</i>
How to use	Leaf: tea, tincture, capsule; fruit: food, juice
Climate zones	5, 6
Companion plants	Likes most vegetables; dislikes blackberries (must be the black sheep of the berry family) and potatoes

Pot	No
-----	----

### **MEDICINAL USES**

Raspberry leaf is a traditional remedy through pregnancy. Early in the pregnancy, raspberry leaf (along with ginger and peppermint) reduces symptoms of morning sickness, and studies show it may help prevent miscarriage. However, it is in the last trimester of pregnancy that raspberry leaf truly comes into its own by ‘tonifying’ the womb. Raspberry leaf helps build up the strength of the myometrium (uterine muscle), as well as the pelvic muscles and ligaments, which leads to an easier delivery. Raspberry leaf is also helpful in the prevention of excess menstrual bleeding and reducing diarrhoea.

The raspberry fruit is rich in vitamin C, anthocyanins (the same as red grapes) and is one of the highest sources of ellagic acid, which has both anticancer and antiviral properties.

### **GOOD FOR**

#### **Leaf**

*Internally:* Pregnancy (especially third trimester), heavy periods, diarrhoea.

#### **Fruit**

*Internally:* Add to your diet for general health, immunity, cancer and heart disease prevention.

### **HOW TO USE IT**

#### **Leaf**

*Internally:* Tea, tincture, capsule (see pages 33–36).

#### **Fruit**

*Internally:* Eat fresh and use in cooking and drinks, whole or juiced.

### **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Raspberries are a kind of bramble, which is defined as a thorny shrub of the rose family. As when dealing with roses, the wise gardener uses thick gloves to harvest the leaves and fruit. The raspberries themselves grow from canes which shoot up from a ground root system. Raspberries are heavy feeders, require plenty of water and need mulching. They thrive in a cool climate, and need to be protected from sun and hot weather by shade cloths. In order for you (rather than the birds) to enjoy the fruit, net the area as soon as the flowers appear. It may take two to three years before raspberry brambles bear fruit (leaves much sooner, naturally), but they remain productive for up to thirty years. Before drying the leaves, remove them from the thick cane or stem. Raspberries are best grown on a trellis.

## Rose

The rose is deeply symbolic of love and beauty, body and mind. The scent of this flower has been highly prized by perfumists and, with 10,000 kilograms of flowers used to create just one litre of oil, rose is one of the most expensive essences available. Although mostly grown for its physical beauty and perfume, roses are also used medicinally. The variety of rose will depend on whether you require the petals, rosebuds or rosehips (the flask-shaped fruit of the rose left when the petals drop). Usually *Rosa damascena* or *Rosa gallica officinalis* are chosen for the petals and buds, whereas the preferred rosehips are the fruit of *Rosa canina*.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Fairly easy
Part used	Rose petal, rosebud, rosehip
Goes well with	Rose: damiana and St John's wort for depression; thyme, sage, echinacea or licorice for bronchitis, asthma. Rose oil: lavender oil for sleep and anxiety. Rosehips: echinacea, calendula or olive leaf for coughs and colds. Rosehip-infused oil: calendula-infused oil if skin is prone to infections

Also known as	<i>Rosa damascena</i> : damask rose, rose of Castile; <i>Rosa gallica officinalis</i> : apothecary's rose, French rose, Gallic rose; <i>Rosa canina</i> : dog rose
How to use	Rose petals and buds: tea, cream; rose oil: external; rosehips: tea, tincture, capsule, infused oil
Climate zones	1–6 (best 3–6)
Companion plants	Parsley, garlic, onions, lettuce
Pot	Yes

## MEDICINAL USES

### Rosebuds and petals

Roses, in the form of rosebuds, are commonly used in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). The TCM approach differs from the Western view of medicine, as conditions are given various attributes, and the appropriate remedy is chosen on this basis. Rose has properties that are sweet, bitter and warm and is associated with the liver and spleen meridian. Conditions well suited to being treated with rosebuds are bloating, abdominal pain, diarrhoea, bronchitis, asthma, painful and heavy periods and depression. Rose petals can be used for the same conditions as rosebuds.

### Rose essential oil

In aromatherapy, rose oil is extremely expensive and is often sold as a percentage of another oil such as jojoba. It helps to heal the heart — that is, the metaphysical heart — soothing emotions including anger, hurt, childhood pain, guilt, sorrow — any strong negative emotion. Rub a couple of drops onto the centre of the chest (the heart chakra) several times a day.

Other uses for rose essential oil include depression, impotence, stress-related conditions, irregular menstruation, and dry and sensitive skin conditions.

### **AROMATHERAPY**

When a molecule of smell enters the nose it triggers the olfactory nerve. Within nanoseconds this nerve sends a message to the limbic system, which is known as the ‘primitive brain’ because it’s in charge of emotions and memory. This is what makes smell so powerful. We don’t have time to analyse it; smell bypasses the thinking bits of the brain and goes straight to the action — our emotions and feelings. Emotions can affect our immune and nervous systems, making aromatherapy a subtle but effective way to heal. Studies have shown that those who have lost a partner or loved one are more likely to suffer a heart attack in six months than a control group. Acknowledging the pain of grief, and using techniques such as aromatherapy, can help people through this time without becoming ill themselves.

### **Rosehips**

The ruby colour and pleasant, mildly astringent taste of rosehips make them a favourite in herbal tea blends. Rosehips contain extraordinary amounts of vitamin C, up to 2000 mg per 100 g of fruit. They are often used to treat and prevent coughs and colds. During the Second World War, British children were encouraged to drink rosehip syrup to obtain a sufficient amount of vitamin C, as imported fruit (like oranges) was restricted. The astringent nature of rosehips is also good for heavy periods and diarrhoea. Interestingly,

these are the same recommendations given for rosebuds in TCM. Rosehip-infused oil is excellent for a variety of skin conditions.

## **GOOD FOR**

### **Rosebuds and petals**

*Internally:* Bronchitis, asthma, heavy periods, painful periods, bloating, abdominal pain, depression, diarrhoea.

*Topically:* Anxiety, depression, dry skin.

### **Rose essential oil**

*Topically:* Cherishing the heart, depression, impotence, stress-related conditions, irregular menstruation, dry and sensitive skin.

### **Rosehips**

*Internally:* Treatment and prevention of coughs and colds, bronchitis, heavy periods, diarrhoea.

*Topically:* Dry skin, eczema, reducing pigmentation, wrinkles and the effects of sun damage.

## **HOW TO USE IT**

### **Rosebuds and petals**

*Internally:* Tea (see page 33), or add rose petals to salads and desserts.

*Topically:* Cream, infused oil (see pages 40–41).

### **Rose essential oil**

*Topically:* Add a few drops to massage base oil, or directly on to skin.

### **Rosehips**

*Internally:* Tea, capsule, tincture (see pages 33–36).

*Topically:* Massage rosehip-infused oil on to skin.

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Growing roses well depends a lot on where you live. They need cold winters and hot summers and are susceptible to fungal conditions,

such as black spot, in humid areas. However, dedicated gardeners can grow roses successfully anywhere, even in Darwin. Prune to create an open vase effect; this will allow better air circulation. Keeping the leaves dry is important for reducing black spot, so water into the roots. Another tip is to cut off any leaves affected before they fall to the ground, which allows spores to reinfect the plant. Aphids are in love with roses, particularly the tender new growth. Regularly spray with white oil, and encourage ladybirds and other aphid-loving creatures.

### **SUB ROSA**

During the Middle Ages, a rose was suspended from the ceiling in important and secret meetings. This signified that what went on under the rose, or 'sub rosa', was to be kept in the strictest confidence.

## Rosemary

**A** Mediterranean herb with an unforgettable fragrance — literally. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, rosemary is immortalised for its memory-boosting powers: 'There's rosemary, that's for remembrance' In Australia and New Zealand, on the same day every year, diggers from all wars are fondly remembered by those who gather on Anzac Day wearing a sprig of rosemary.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Leaf
Goes well with	For memory: ginkgo or gotu kola; for liver: dandelion or St Mary's thistle; antioxidant: turmeric
Also known as	<i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>
How to use	Tea, tincture, capsule, compress, cream, infused oil, essential oil, bath
Climate zones	1-6

Companion plants	Sage, beans, carrots, cabbages; dislikes potatoes
Pot	Yes

**MEDICINAL USES**

Rosemary has a beneficial effect on brain function, the liver, digestion, joint pain and circulation. This herb contains an impressive array of antioxidants. Rosemary improves concentration, memory and alertness. This can be achieved by taking rosemary internally, or merely smelling rosemary essential oil. There is interest in rosemary’s role in guarding against Alzheimer’s disease. Rosemary essential oil rubbed into the temples helps reduce the pain of headache.

Rosemary has particular relevance to the liver, by protecting it from damage and improving its role as the body’s major detoxifier. The liver produces bile, partly a digestive juice, and partly a waste product. Herbs that help the liver often do this by increasing the production and flow of bile. Rosemary is the remedy to think of with heavy alcohol consumption or a history of hepatitis, drug use (prescription or recreational) or liver damage ... or simply an under-functioning liver. Symptoms of poor liver and bile function include constipation and skin conditions such as psoriasis. As the liver helps in the elimination of excess oestrogen, rosemary can help in PMS, endometriosis and fibroids, and there are a couple of studies showing it may help in the prevention of breast cancer. Rosemary is one of the carminative herbs, helping to settle the tummy after meals, improving digestion, reducing reflux, bloating and flatulence.

One of the antioxidants found in rosemary is carnosol. Carnosol has been shown to protect the arteries from atherosclerosis, a major cause of heart attacks and stroke. The antioxidant array found in rosemary may also protect against cancers. The combination of this

and its role in aiding the liver to remove unwanted hormones increases rosemary's value as a guard against breast cancer.

Rosemary is also antimicrobial, with an effect on both bacterial and fungal conditions, including candida. Applying rosemary to wounds or infections will aid healing.

Recommended for venous insufficiency, rosemary improves the strength of blood vessel walls and improves circulation. It will help those suffering from hypotension, or low blood pressure, but will not increase blood pressure.

### **ROSEMARY'S GRAND HISTORY**

For hundreds of years rosemary has been used for spiritual, medicinal and culinary purposes, as well as for perfume. Archaeologists have found evidence of the Egyptian dead holding sprigs of rosemary before being embalmed and mummified. During the fourteenth century, a Queen Elizabeth of Hungary (which queen is in dispute) suffered from gout and arthritis. A monk (one of the medicos of the day) created a medicine based on rosemary, to both drink and rub on her sore joints. So nice did Queen E smell that apparently a proposal of marriage was made to her when she was quite elderly (she declined). This cure became known as Hungary Water, and is still used as a remedy and perfume to this day.

Thomas More (1478–1535), who penned *Utopia* and was adviser to Henry VIII until beheaded by same, wrote of rosemary, 'I lette it runne all over my garden walls, not onelie because my bees love it, but because it is the herb sacred to remembrance and therefore to friendship.'

### **GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Attention, protection and treatment of the liver, helps guard against cancer (particularly breast cancer) and heart disease, detoxification, PMS, fibroids, endometriosis, poor digestion, flatulence, bloating, headache, poor memory, poor circulation, varicose veins, haemorrhoids, arthritis, gout, low blood pressure.

*Topically:* Arthritic joints, gout, headache.

*Caution:* Rosemary has a strong action, and it's best to take in low doses. Of course, the essential oil should never be taken internally.

## **HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Tea, tincture, capsule (see pages 33–36).

*Topically:* Rosemary can be used as a compress, cream or infused oil (see pages 37–41) for painful arthritic joints or gout — be very gentle. Add a few drops of essential oil of rosemary to boost the medicinal effect. A drop of rosemary essential oil can be rubbed into the temples for relief of headaches. A rosemary bath (add a couple of cups of rosemary tea with a few drops of essential oil) is perfect to help concentration and ease painful joints.

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

There are several varieties of rosemary, from a dense upright shrub to a prostrate and spreading groundcover. All have highly scented, pine-needle shaped leaves. All love the heat and a well-drained soil. All varieties have similar medicinal properties. Rosemary tolerates being close to the sea; in fact *ros marinus* is Latin for 'sea dew'. Prune once a year after flowering to a couple of centimetres above last year's growth. This discourages legginess and encourages new growth. A vigorous pruning also encourages airflow which will discourage powdery mildew, a disease rosemary is prone to. Rosemary can also develop root rot if overwatered.

## Sage

Sixteenth-century English botanist and herbalist John Hill wrote that ‘Sage will retard that rapid progress of decay that treads upon our heels so fast in latter years of life, will preserve faculty and memory more valuable to the rational mind, than life itself’.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Leaf, flower (either or both)
Goes well with	For menopause: black cohosh or soy; for mouth and throat infections: calendula or echinacea; for memory: ginkgo, brahmi or gotu kola
Also known as	<i>Salvia officinalis</i>
How to use	Food, tea, tincture, capsule, poultice, compress
Climate zones	3–6

Companion plants	Rosemary, cabbages, carrots; dislikes cucumbers, onions, wormwood
Pot	Yes

**MEDICINAL USES**

Salvia (*Salvia officinalis*) comes from the Latin *salveo*, meaning ‘to heal’. Sage is astringent and antibacterial, two actions that are important for treating inflamed and infected mucous membranes, and the reason why sage creates a winning gargle for gum disease, sore throats, tonsillitis and laryngitis. Sage is often recommended to reduce the debilitating hot flushes of menopause and is good for excessive sweating (hyperhidrosis) from any cause.

Sage by name and sage by nature. Sage has a history of being used as a nerve tonic, in particular for improving cognitive skills and memory. There are some promising studies showing sage may help improve the memory and reduce the agitation of those suffering from Alzheimer’s disease.

**GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Excessive sweating, hot flushes of menopause, sore throat, tonsillitis, mouth ulcers, gum disease, poor memory, improving concentration; may be helpful in Alzheimer’s disease for memory and agitation; reducing the flow of breast milk when weaning.

*Topically:* Reducing breast milk flow.

*Caution:* Other than culinary use, avoid during pregnancy and breastfeeding (unless reducing breast milk is a goal).

**HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally/Topically:* Food, tea (as a mouthwash), tincture, capsule (see pages 33–36). For reducing milk flow, both or either as tea (taken internally) or compress or poultice (see pages 37–38) externally.

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Like rosemary and thyme, sage hails from the Mediterranean, and has similar needs, requiring full sun and good drainage. If your place meets these requirements, you'll find growing sage a snack. It has a shrub-like habit with woolly grey leaves and summer spikes of purple-blue flowers. Sage makes an attractive border and helps keep pests away from other plants. Prune to prevent the plant getting too leggy; it will need to be replaced every two to three years. Plant from seed or root division. For the kitchen, sage doesn't dry well, so best to use fresh. However, this does not apply if you are drying for medicinal uses. (See pages 31–32 for how to dry herbs.)

## Shiitake mushroom

Cultivated for over 1000 years in China and Japan, shiitake mushrooms are appreciated as much for their delicious meaty flavour as for their outstanding medicinal properties. These mushrooms are but one of hundreds of medicinal fungi. Among the other fabulous fungi is *Penicillium chrysogenum*, the fungus that gave the world its first antibiotic, penicillin.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Fairly difficult
Part used	Whole mushroom
Goes well with	Reishi
Also known as	<i>Lentinula edodes</i> , Chinese black mushroom, black forest mushroom
How to use	Food, tea, capsule
Climate zones	5, 6
Companion	No

plants	
Pot	No

### **MEDICINAL USES**

The compound lentinan found in shiitake mushrooms increases the immune response, reduces cancerous tumours and also has antiviral properties. Traditional Chinese Medicine claims that shiitake is a strengthening and restorative medicine for any condition marked by low energy. In Japan, shiitake mushrooms are used as an adjunct to chemotherapy to help patients through the therapy and hasten recovery. Shiitake are excellent for weakened immune systems, including HIV and chronic fatigue, as well as a host of autoimmune conditions, including rheumatoid arthritis and lupus.

### **GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Convalescing from cancer treatment, post-viral fatigue, autoimmune conditions, chronic fatigue syndrome, cancer prevention.

### **HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Shiitake mushrooms are so delicious there is no hardship in adding this medicine to stir-fries, casseroles and soups. They can also be taken as tea or a capsule (see pages 33–36).

### **GROWING YOUR OWN**

For the adventurous gardener, growing shiitake mushrooms is not that hard, it just requires the correct material. You will need to buy small wooden dowel plugs which are impregnated with shiitake spore. Additionally, you'll need a receptacle for the plugs. A log is perfect, preferably oak, elder or birch, as the wood needs to be able to withstand frequent watering. Avoid treated pine. Drill dowel-sized holes in the log about 10 cm apart, about one and half times as deep as the plug. Insert the dowel and backfill with bees' wax to seal the hole. Store the log in a shady place above ground so other

fungi don't invade. Water the log a couple of times a week. This will seem a meaningless task, and your neighbours will wonder about you, but keep watering, as it takes between six and twelve months before the log is fully colonised and mushrooms appear up and down the log.

## Spinach

Spinach has a long history of providing energy and strength. Well before Popeye recommended spinach, Ayurvedic medicine promised that by eating spinach you would enjoy increased vitality and libido, and recommended it as a cure for insomnia and insanity. Quite a lot to expect from such a little green leaf. Spinach is well worth making part of your regular diet, but, unlike Popeye, grow and eat spinach fresh, not from a can. And, like Popeye, add a little olive oil.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Leaf
Goes well with	In juices: carrot, parsley or ginger
Also known as	<i>Spinacia oleracea</i> , <i>English spinach</i>
How to use	Food
Climate zones	1–6

Companion plants	Celery, onions, eggplants, cabbages, peas, strawberries
Pot	Yes

**MEDICINAL USES**

Spinach is a rich source of magnesium, calcium, potassium, iron, betacarotene and chlorophyll, and is especially high in folic acid. Also known as vitamin B9, folic acid is well known to help prevent neural tube defects (NTDs) in babies. NTDs occur when the spinal column fails to develop properly. It is not only in this area that folic acid is important, however: it is central to helping all cells replicate (via DNA) in an orderly manner. This is why it shows promise in the treatment of and protection from cervical and other cancers.

**GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Low energy, anaemia, before and during pregnancy; helps in prevention of cervical and other cancers.

**WHY YOU SHOULD EAT YOUR GREENS**

The importance of green foods and juices is often referred to in naturopathy. Green comes from chlorophyll and other pigments, such as carotenoids, known to be antioxidant and have other health-giving benefits. Although this is an area not yet extensively studied, there is evidence that chlorophyll may help rejuvenate cells and repair DNA. Many people who take green juices and powders that combine alfalfa, spirulina, chlorella, broccoli and spinach speak of increased energy and a feeling of wellbeing.

Chlorophyll collects light needed for photosynthesis, which is how plants transform light energy into food energy. The structure of chlorophyll is very similar to the haem molecule, which is part of haemoglobin in red blood cells and responsible for dispersing oxygen throughout the body. The

major difference between chlorophyll molecules and haemoglobin molecules is that at the heart of the chlorophyll molecule lies the mineral magnesium, whereas haemoglobin contains iron.

## **HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Juices. Raw in salads, steamed, stir-fried or in stews. (Note: spinach shrinks by a factor of ten when cooked.)

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

English spinach is often confused with silverbeet. They are related, and have similar nutritional value, however English spinach has smaller leaves and a more delicate flavour than silverbeet. Grow spinach from seeds or seedlings. Pick regularly, but sparingly, from the outside of the plant. It requires a moist, well-drained, compost-rich soil. Sun to part shade. Feed every four weeks with liquid fertiliser. Pick some leaves every day or two, otherwise your spinach plant will feel neglected, bolt and run to seed. It is prudent to sow a few seeds every couple of weeks over summer to prevent a feast and famine situation. Spinach is prone to snails, slugs and leaf miner.

## St John's wort

One in five Australians will suffer from depression at some time in their life. Ironically, the herb that treats depression, St John's wort, a European native, runs rampant in the Australian landscape, taking over pastures and creating havoc amongst livestock — and farmers. So the plant that cures depression, may in some cases be the very cause!

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Flower, leaf (either or both)
Goes well with	For viruses: echinacea; for anxiety: kava, valerian or passionflower; for insomnia: valerian, California poppy, passionflower or lavender; for depression: damiana, or rose
Also known as	<i>Hypericum perforatum</i>
How to use	Tea, tincture, capsule, compress, infused oil, cream
Climate	1–6

zones	
Companion plants	No
Pot	Yes

**MEDICINAL USES**

Since the Middle Ages, herbalists have prescribed St John’s wort for ‘a melancholic disposition’. It also comes in handy for relieving nervousness, anxiety and sleep problems. St John’s wort is an excellent remedy for menopause, particularly if there are mood swings.

St John’s wort also reduces the activity of certain viruses, including the herpes virus (shingles, cold sores and genital herpes), parainfluenza virus and also the duck hepatitis B virus (handy if you happen to know a duck with a dicky liver). But it is perhaps for the treatment of mild to moderate depression that St John’s wort has earned its medical stripes. Many trials (including trials reported in the *Lancet* and the *British Medical Journal*) have concluded that St John’s wort is as effective for the symptoms of mild depression as Prozac and other similar drugs, but without the side effects.

This wort is also helpful in wound healing, increasing the proliferation of cells as well as having an antibacterial action. Very good for wounds, rashes and helping to heal burns. For this purpose it can be taken both internally, and used externally (the infused oil), as a compress or poultice (see pages 37–38).

**GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Mild to moderate depression, insomnia, nervousness, anxiety, menopausal mood swings, guarding against and treating various viruses, such as viral hepatitis, cold sores, chickenpox, shingles and genital herpes. Also used for wound healing.

*Topically:* Burns, rashes, cold sores, chickenpox, shingles, genital herpes.

*Caution:* St John's wort is regarded as a noxious weed and prohibited in many Australian states for two reasons. Firstly it is an extremely invasive species, competing aggressively with native vegetation and pasture. Seed can lay dormant for twenty years in the soil. Secondly, the flowers can cause severe photosensitivity in horses, cows and sheep. The photosensitivity affects parts without fur, such as lips, ears and nose, causing inflammation and overheating which can result in death. Animals will recover if kept out of the sun and removed from St John's wort. Photosensitivity reaction in humans is rare, but can occur. The medicinal dose of St John's wort is measured in milligrams to grams, while livestock will eat St John's wort by the kilogram.

St John's wort may interact with several medications. If you are taking any medications, seek advice from your healthcare practitioner before taking this herb.

## **HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Tea, tincture, capsule (see pages 33–36).

*Topically:* Infused oil, cream, compress, poultice (see pages 37–41).

### **WORT LORE AND LEGEND**

'*Perforatum*' in the botanical name of St John's wort refers to the tiny holes that are visible in the leaves when held up to the light. These are not actually perforations but rather tiny oil glands filled with red oil. Tradition has it that St John's wort first flowers on 24 June (in the European summer) which happens to be St John's Day, the anniversary of the birth of St John the Baptist. The red colouring of the oil in the leaves symbolises the blood of the saint, and during the Middle Ages the flowers were hung on the outside walls of houses to ward off evil spirits.

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

St John's wort is a prohibited weed in some states. To see if it is permissible to grow it in your area, check with your local council or department of primary industries.

St John's wort is a hardy perennial herb with golden-yellow five-petalled flowers, a bit like a large buttercup. As is the way with most plants classified as a weed, St John's wort is very hardy and must be kept in check. It prefers full sun but will tolerate partial shade and grows best in a moist sandy soil. It grows well from seed as well as by root division.

## St Mary's thistle

One of the big guns for protecting and healing the liver, St Mary's thistle has been researched and trialled extensively. A most persuasive study showed that St Mary's thistle, taken before death cap mushroom (*Amanita phalloides*) poisoning, prevented harm to the liver and, if one was forgetful enough to eat the mushroom without first taking St Mary's thistle, it was also able to heal the liver afterwards.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Seed
Goes well with	For liver conditions: dandelion root, globe artichoke or turmeric; for breast milk production: fennel seeds
Also known as	<i>Silybum marianum</i> , milk thistle
How to use	Tea, tincture, capsule
Climate zones	1-6

Companion plants	No
Pot	Yes

**MEDICINAL USES**

The liver is where nearly everything we ingest, inhale and inject goes to be processed, good and bad. So it is in our best interest to protect this indispensable organ from damage. Especially when it comes to processing the more toxic substances such as alcohol, chemicals and pollutants. St Mary’s thistle does its best work when used for preventing damage to the liver. St Mary’s thistle stimulates the production of bile from the liver, thereby improving waste removal and digestion of fats. It also has been shown to lower cholesterol. St Mary’s thistle is also a galactagogue, a herb that improves and promotes breast milk production.

Silymarin, the active principle in St Mary’s thistle, has been shown to possess powerful antioxidant properties, helping to protect cells from damage by free radicals.

**GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Liver damage (whatever cause), fatty liver, jaundice, cirrhosis, exposure to chemicals (pre-and post-exposure), gallbladder disease, high cholesterol, hangover, increasing breast milk production.

**HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Tea, tincture, capsule (see pages 33–36). Although tinctures are alcohol-based, and alcohol is something to be avoided if the liver is unwell, the amount of alcohol is minute.

**ANTIOXIDANTS**

Since the mid-1990s, antioxidants have been a buzzword in the fields of both nutrition and medicine. Antioxidants are of

interest to nutritionists (and naturopaths) because most antioxidants are found in food, and for medicine because antioxidants help guard against certain diseases, including heart disease, cancer, diabetes, arthritis and autoimmune conditions. The discovery of antioxidants and what they do in the body has transformed the old-fashioned message of eating fresh fruit and vegetables and whole grains into scientific good sense.

### *Oxygen — friend and foe*

We have come to know oxygen as a handy little molecule that helps us stay alive, but when oxygen is altered chemically it may oxidise certain substances to form free radicals. Free radicals are thought to be at least partially responsible for heart disease and cancer. Factors that add to this unfortunate state of affairs include radiation (from the sun, mobile phones, X-rays, etc.), carcinogens (like cigarette smoke, benzene, diesel exhaust), pesticides and the general process of ageing. Oxidative damage is a fact of life.

Free radicals wreak havoc in the body, including — and this is the scary part — the DNA found in the central nucleus of cells. DNA is the blueprint, or recipe, for the creation of new cells. If the recipe is changed, new cells are created with a difference or mutation. Most times these mutated cells get gobbled up by the immune system, but sometimes they survive, and they divide in a manner not originally intended, for example forming a tumour. The number of potentially damaging hits to DNA per cell per day is about 100,000, and there are over 100 trillion cells per human. Considering this kind of bombardment, it's a wonder we have time to make a cup of tea, let alone to repair and protect all these cells from free radical damage.

### *Fruit to the rescue*

In response to free radical damage, our body manufactures antioxidants on the spot (including superoxide dismutase and

catalase). In addition, our diet provides us with antioxidants; that is, if the diet is a good one. In the last few years there has been a flurry of scientific research into antioxidants. Not a week goes by without another antioxidant being identified, often from the plant world. Which only goes to prove: never underestimate a vegetable.

You may already be familiar with antioxidants such as vitamins A, C and E, as well as zinc and selenium. In fact, a run-of-the-mill multivitamin and mineral supplement is a good source of antioxidants. However, don't rely solely on supplements for your antioxidant intake. For a start, new antioxidants are being found all the time in simple everyday foods. For example, catechins (good for preventing heart disease and cancer) are found in tea (green and black) and red wine. Lycopene (helps protect against prostate cancer) is found in cooked tomatoes and pink grapefruit. Coincidentally, many of the substances that make plants brightly coloured are antioxidants. Other plant antioxidants include silymarin (found in St Mary's thistle), also good for the liver; curcumin, another one good for the liver, found in turmeric; and the detoxifying and antioxidant substance indole-3-carbinol, which is found in abundance in broccoli, brussels sprouts and cabbage.

We can't stop all free radical damage, but we can help the body help itself.

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

St Mary's thistle is a striking plant with large, dark-green, variegated leaves that are marbled with white veins and yellow spikes on the edge, and purple thistle flowers. Best grown by seed, it does well in poor soil and is drought-tolerant. Up to 200 seeds are produced in the flower heads, each protected by a white tuft of hair, similar to a dandelion. These need to be removed after harvesting.

## Tea tree

Tea tree oil is Australia's iconic gift to medicine. Its proven antibacterial and antifungal effects have made a bottle of tea tree oil a must in first-aid cupboards around the world.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Fairly easy
Part used	Leaf
Goes well with	For candida infections: garlic; for wound healing: echinacea or calendula
Also known as	<i>Melaleuca alternifolia</i> , narrow-leafed paperbark
How to use	Essential oil, cream, tea, compress
Climate zones	1–6
Companion plants	No
Pot	Yes

## **MEDICINAL USES**

Tea tree oil is an essential oil derived from the leaves of the tea tree. The oil contains high levels of a type of terpene, which is active against a wide range of bacteria and fungi. Tea tree also has the power to regenerate skin cells. It is a potent combination when a substance can kill the germs, stimulate the immune process and hasten healing.

Great results can be had by painting neat tea tree oil onto fungal toenails. The secret is to be patient. The oil is also very good at relieving pimples and reducing scarring. Tea tree oil diluted with water, or a tea made from the leaves, is a terrific rinse or compress for cuts, sores and even eczema.

It's the essential oil made from the leaves of the *Melaleuca* plant that has the most therapeutic effect. However, essential oils must never be taken internally as even a few millilitres are toxic and can cause damage to the liver. However, boiling up a small handful of the fresh leaves (an indigenous remedy) and drinking one or two cups daily is not toxic, and is good for sore throats, gum disease, mouth ulcers and oral thrush.

## **GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Mouth ulcers, oral thrush, gingivitis, sore throats.

*Topically:* Vaginal thrush (candidiasis), acne, fungal nail infections, insect bites, burns, eczema, wounds.

*Caution:* Rarely, tea tree oil can cause a rash and stinging. Apply to a small area of skin first, to see if you are sensitive.

## **HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Tea (see page 33).

*Topically:* Apply a drop or two of the essential oil (see page 39) to pimples, fungal nail infections, bites and wounds. Apply cream (see page 41) to burns and eczema. Add a drop of tea tree oil to a douche mixture, avoiding if it causes stinging.

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

The evergreen tea tree is native to the north coast of New South Wales and adjacent areas. It is slow growing and can reach a height of 15 m. The white cream flowers look like miniature bottlebrushes, and can be quite profuse during spring and summer. Tea trees can be propagated from seed, but this can be difficult, and it is easier to buy tube stock or a small plant. Like many Australian natives, tea trees prefer a low-nitrogen soil. They require full sun.

## Thyme

**T**hyme is one of several of the aromatic Mediterranean herbs as much at home in the cooking pot as the first-aid cabinet.

Thymol, an antibacterial compound in thyme, is an ingredient in a well-known commercial mouthwash that claims to kill bad breath germs.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Leaf, flower (either or both)
Goes well with	For respiratory infections: calendula or echinacea; for coughs: licorice
Also known as	<i>Thymus vulgaris</i>
How to use	Food, tea, tincture, capsule, mouthwash, gargle
Climate zones	1–6
Companion	Cabbages, lavender

plants	
Pot	Yes

## MEDICINAL USES

Thyme is traditionally used for respiratory infections, especially when there is catarrh, and particularly in the lungs. It helps remove excess mucus from the system. The two constituents which give thyme its distinctive Mediterranean aroma, thymol and carvacrol, are also antibacterial, an added benefit when treating coughs, colds and sore throats. In fact most infections in the body, from skin to bladder. Thyme has also been found to be an effective agent against the bug behind stomach ulcers, *Helicobacter pylori*, especially when used as a preventative or in conjunction with other therapies. Sprigs of dried thyme (as well as lavender) historically were placed between clean linen to keep away bugs and insects.

## GOOD FOR

*Internally:* Colds, bronchitis, productive coughs, whooping cough, tonsillitis, sore throats, gingivitis, bad breath, preventing gastritis, stomach ulcers, urinary infections.

*Topically:* Fungal infections.

*Caution:* Best to avoid during pregnancy, except in cooking.

## *Thyme for a throat gargle*

---

A gargle for a sore throat can be made by making a strong tea of thyme, and waiting for it to cool. Gargle vigorously and swallow. If you have other herbs on hand you could add one or more of the following: calendula, echinacea, tea tree. A gargle can also be made by adding a teaspoon of tincture to half a cup of warm water.

## HOW TO USE IT

*Internally:* Tea, tincture, capsule (see pages 32–36).

*Topically:* Use the tea as a mouthwash for bad breath, or as a gargle for sore throats (see recipe above). Apply thyme oil to fungal infections.

### **GROWING YOUR OWN**

*Thymus vulgaris* (common garden thyme) is the one used traditionally for medicine, however, other varieties, including the delicious lemon thyme, can be used as a replacement.

A hardy herb with pretty pink flowers, thyme needs little watering once established. It requires a sunny position with sandy, well-drained soil. Thyme grows low to the ground, ideal for rockeries or between pavers. Prune hard in spring otherwise it can grow woody and leggy. Root rot and mildew can be problems in humid areas.

## Tomato

A perennial question at trivia nights is whether the tomato is a fruit or vegetable. Botanically, tomatoes are fruit, as they grow from the ovary within the flower and contain the seeds of the plant. However, in 1887 the US government placed a tariff that imposed duty on vegetables, but not fruit. Several years later, a Supreme Court case (Nix v. Haddon) decided that tomatoes are vegetables, as they are usually served with dinner, not dessert. In my opinion, the jury is still out.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Fruit
Goes well with	For general immunity: parsley, holy basil, onion or garlic
Also known as	<i>Solanum lycopersicum</i> , <i>Lycopersicon esculentum</i>
How to use	Food
Climate zones	1–6 (frost tender)

Companion plants	Asparagus, basil, calendula, garlic, carrots, nasturtiums, nettles; dislikes fennel, potatoes, stone fruit, rosemary
Pot	Yes

**MEDICINAL USES**

Containing reasonable amounts of vitamin C and potassium, the tomato’s main claim to nutritional fame is lycopene. This substance, a carotenoid, is responsible for the tomato’s red colour, and similarly for the rosy hue of watermelons, guavas and pink grapefruit. Lycopene is helpful in protecting against prostate cancer, and also has potential for lowering cholesterol, and reducing heart disease, cataracts, asthma and age-related macular degeneration. The percentage of lycopene increases with heating, so tomato sauce, paste and canned tomatoes are particularly good sources of this desirable nutrient.

Tomatoes are often blamed as a cause of arthritis. After twenty years of practice I find this is not usually the case; tomatoes are more likely to be a trigger for heartburn or reflux. However, as with any potential food allergen, the best way to find out if it is a problem is to avoid the potential offender for a month. If you notice an improvement in your condition, keep avoiding, but if there is no difference, then start eating the culprit; he’s off the list.

**STORY OF THE FRUIT OF LOVE**

*Tomatl* is Aztec for ‘plump fruit’, and Central America is where tomatoes originated. As a member of the Solanaceae family, the tomato has several well-known siblings, including potatoes, tobacco, eggplant, capsicum and chilli — and their evil (and poisonous) brother, deadly nightshade. In the early sixteenth century, when the Solanaceae crew were introduced to Europe, most members of the family were adopted and

became well loved, such as potatoes and tobacco, whereas the tomato was initially called ‘poison apple’, possibly being tarred with the deadly nightshade brush. However, it wasn’t too long before Italians noticed how well tomatoes went together with pasta and pizza, naming them *pomi d’oro* (golden apples), and the ever romantic French declared tomatoes *pommes d’amour* (fruit of love), including them in ratatouille and Provençale dishes. The Brits, however, remained stoically cynical, and tomatoes never really took off there.

## **GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Protects against prostate cancer, age-related macular degeneration, cataracts, high cholesterol, asthma.

## **HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Cooking, salads, juices.

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

For the most intense flavour, don’t overwater, and try to avoid watering the fruit and leaves as they have a tendency to form mildew when wet; just water the earth around the plant, and mulch heavily to keep the soil cool and roots moist. Grow from seeds or seedlings. Tomatoes are heavy feeders. Most varieties need to be staked, serving to create more airflow between the branches, a good thing for this fungus-prone plant. Net the tomatoes just before they ripen so you get to eat them before the birds. Nothing beats the smell and flavour of a tomato picked ripe from the vine on a mid-summer’s day. Particularly if it’s your vine, your tomato. The trick to keeping a tomato smelling good is to keep the green stem attached until moments before eating. Tomatoes are prone to fungal disease, aphids, thrips, caterpillars, bird attack and fruit fly. Protect the ripening fruit from sun on hot summer days.

## Turmeric

It's a colour, it's a medicine and it's a spice. Turmeric: a rhizome for all reasons.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Fairly easy
Part used	Rhizome
Goes well with	For liver: St Mary's thistle, dandelion or globe artichoke
<i>Also known as</i>	<i>Curcuma longa</i>
How to use	Food, tincture, capsule, cream
Climate zones	1–5 (frost tender)
Companion plants	No
Pot	Yes

## **MEDICINAL USES**

Turmeric is one of the major medicines of both China and India, for good reason. It has several platforms of action. The first being anti-inflammatory, which makes it ideal for arthritis and inflamed skin such as eczema. The second being a liver tonic, improving digestion and treating jaundice, gallbladder problems, poor liver function and protecting the liver from damage. Thirdly, turmeric is a wonderful antioxidant, helping to protect against cancer and heart disease. Not bad for a medicine that makes a mean curry.

## **GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Arthritis (both rheumatoid and osteo), eczema, psoriasis, prevention and treatment of heart disease, liver and digestive problems, heavy drinking or other harmful effects to the liver, high cholesterol, guards against cancer.

*Topically:* Eczema, psoriasis.

## **HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Dried and powdered turmeric can be added to food in cooking, or made into a tincture (see page 34) or capsule (see page 36).

*Topically:* Use cream (see page 41) for skin conditions.

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

A member of the ginger family, turmeric grows well in all places tropical; that is, warm climates above 20°C. Place a cutting of root with a small bud in some compost, the bud facing upwards. Leave in a warm place until the bud shoots, then plant. Turmeric prefers rich, moist soil in heavy shade. Apart from the therapeutic and culinary value, turmeric is well worth growing just for its exotic flowers and lush greenery. When cutting and processing the turmeric, unless you like yellow, beware the sap that will stain clothes and any part of the body it touches.

## Valerian

Valerian is also known as all heal and phu (relating to its smell). Although not generally favoured by humans, cats are attracted to the scent of valerian and love to roll in the leaves and flowers; cats know a thing or two about sleep.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Fairly easy
Part used	Root
Goes well with	For sleep: passionflower, hops, California poppy or chamomile; for anxiety: kava or passionflower
Also known as	<i>Valeriana officinalis</i> , all heal, phu
How to use	Capsule, decoction, tincture, tea
Climate zones	1–6 (drought tender)
Companion plants	Plant near vegetables as it promotes earthworm activity

Pot	Yes
-----	-----

### **MEDICINAL USES**

The root of the valerian plant has been used for helping calm the nerves for centuries. It was recommended for men suffering shell shock after the Great War. Generally valerian is regarded as a sleeping aid, but it is also useful for emotional states of anxiety and irritability. It's of particular benefit to people who find loud noises disturb their psyche. It has been used to help people who wish to withdraw from addictive medication such as the benzodiazepines. Valerian is a mild muscle relaxant. This, in concert with its mildly tranquillising qualities, makes it the perfect medicine for tight, sore neck and shoulder muscles caused by tension, and also the headaches which often follow. Also for conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome, in which a common symptom is painful spasming of the bowel, often preceded by a stressful situation.

### **GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Insomnia, improves sleep quality, restlessness, muscle stiffness (especially due to stress), stress, headaches, anxiety, irritable bowel syndrome, may help when withdrawing from sleeping or anti-anxiety medication.

*Topically:* Insomnia, stress.

*Caution:* Rarely, valerian causes what is known as a paradoxical effect, that is, people will feel more alert and be less likely to sleep when taking this herb. If this is the case, look towards hops or passionflower instead. For others, valerian can increase the intensity of dreams.

### **HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Decoction, tea, tincture, capsule (see pages 33–36).

*Topically:* It can be added to the bath (as a decoction, tincture or tea) to help calm and induce sleep.

## **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Valerian is notorious for its unfortunate smell, sometimes described as like rotting socks or sewage. However, the flower is quite pretty with, ironically, a sweet cherry-like smell.

Valerian can be grown from seed or root division. A perennial, it prefers a well-fertilised, weed-free soil in semi-shade. Valerian encourages earthworm activity. Cutting the flowering stems appears to encourage root development. To be most therapeutic, the roots need to grow for two to three years before harvesting and drying.

## Yarrow

The warriors of ancient Greece and Rome used yarrow to staunch their bleeding wounds. So effective was yarrow for this purpose that it was dedicated to the god Achilles, handsome hero of the battle of Troy, hence the botanical name *Achillea*. If you are unlikely to be involved in a chariot race or war involving spears and shields, yarrow still comes in handy for a nosebleed or cut finger.

### AT A GLANCE

How easy to grow	Easy
Part used	Leaf, flower (either or both)
Goes well with	For wounds: calendula; for colds and flu: echinacea or ginger
Also known as	<i>Achillea millefolium</i> , woundwort
How to use	Food, tea, tincture, capsule, compress, poultice
Climate zones	1–6

Companion plants	A good friend to all; adds vitality to other plants
Pot	Yes

**MEDICINAL USES**

Yarrow helps reduce excessive bleeding, so it is good for applying topically to wounds, but it is also useful internally for reducing the blood flow of heavy periods, haemorrhoids and anal fissures. The astringent nature of yarrow means that it is useful for controlling diarrhoea. It is also a bitter herb (see box, page 108), so will improve all manner of digestive ailments, such as bloating, constipation and flatulence.

Another traditional use of yarrow, especially in herbal tea form, is to reduce the fever of colds and flu. Yarrow is a diaphoretic herb, meaning that it encourages sweating. A traditional herbal theory is that by stimulating perspiration, this will break the fever, leaving the body stronger. This is borne out by newer research showing that increasing the body temperature by a degree or two (as in a fever) encourages the production and activity of white blood cells, the body’s defence against viruses and bacteria. Yarrow is also anti-inflammatory, helping relieve the pain of arthritis and period pain. It can be used internally and externally for these conditions.

**GOOD FOR**

*Internally:* Colds and flu, fever (including childhood fever), arthritis, excess bleeding, high blood pressure, diarrhoea, bleeding gums, heavy menstrual bleeding, fibroids, bloating, constipation, flatulence.

*Topically:* Nosebleeds, cuts, external haemorrhoids, anal fissures.

**HOW TO USE IT**

*Internally:* Tea, tincture, capsule (see pages 33–36) for all the conditions listed above. Young leaves can be used in salads.

*Topically:* Compress or poultice (see pages 37–38). For a fresh poultice, crush fresh yarrow leaves and apply topically to an open wound. For nosebleeds, scrunch up a small ball of fresh or dried leaves and gently fill the nostril. After 30 minutes, very gently remove. Place poultices directly on wounds. For bleeding gums, make a very strong tea, rinse mouth, keeping in contact with gums for as long as possible.

### **GROWING YOUR OWN**

Yarrow is a spreading plant with small flowers like miniature daisies gathered in a flat cluster. The second part of the botanical name, *millefolium*, means ‘a thousand leaf’, an apt description of the feathery dark-green foliage. Yarrow has a tendency to spread via an abundance of rootstock. Best to keep it contained in one garden bed if you intend growing this handsome plant. Yarrow is a free and roaming soul, preferring the garden to pots. Similar to comfrey, yarrow leaves are a compost activator. Throw some into your compost every week or so to speed up the composting process.

## **APPENDICES**

1. Medicinal gardens
2. Juices
3. Marijuana as a medicine
4. Suppliers and other useful contacts

## Appendix 1: Medicinal gardens

**D**uring the Middle Ages in England and continental Europe, it was common for wealthier families to have several gardens, including a pleasure garden filled with scented flowers and lawn; a kitchen garden complete with vegetables, culinary herbs and fruit; and a physic, or medicinal, garden where herbs for healing were grown. How nice. Most people today do not have the land, time or money to create several purpose-grown gardens. However, with a little planning, it is possible to tailor-make a garden for your needs. Following are some ideas for gardens that might appeal.

*Flower garden:* Calendula, California poppy, chamomile, echinacea, garlic flower, globe artichoke, hibiscus (flowers only last a day), Jerusalem artichoke, lavender, nasturtium, passionflower, pomegranate, rose, turmeric

*Edible flowers:* Calendula, California poppy, chamomile, echinacea, hibiscus, nasturtium, rose

*Salad garden* (some of the less obvious choices): Alfalfa, beetroot leaf, chickweed, holy basil, lemon balm, yarrow

*Dramatic and interesting foliage garden:* Aloe vera, cabbage, fennel, ginger, ginkgo, globe artichoke, nasturtium, parsley, sage, turmeric

*Detox garden:* Beetroot, broccoli, burdock, cabbage, dandelion, garlic, globe artichoke, St Mary's thistle, turmeric

*Immune garden:* Astragalus, calendula, echinacea, garlic, holy basil, Jerusalem artichoke, lemon myrtle, shiitake mushroom, tea tree, thyme

*Skin garden:* Aloe vera, avocado, burdock, calendula, chamomile, comfrey, gotu kola

*Relaxation and sleep garden:* California poppy, chamomile, kava, lavender, passionflower, St John's wort, valerian

*Mood-enhancing garden:* Damiana, gotu kola, lemon balm, St John's wort

*Digestive garden:* Alfalfa, chamomile, fennel, ginger, Jerusalem artichoke, lemon balm, meadowsweet, papaya, peppermint

*Mother and baby garden:* Cabbage, calendula, chamomile, fennel, lemon balm, nettles

*Stress garden:* Astragalus, California poppy, chamomile, damiana, ginger, gotu kola, holy basil, kava, lavender, licorice, passionflower, rose

*Longevity garden:* Astragalus, brahmi, gotu kola

*Brain garden:* Brahmi, ginkgo, gotu kola, rosemary, sage

*Compost activators:* Comfrey, dandelion, nettle, yarrow

*Scented garden (foliage and flowers):* Chamomile, cinnamon, ginger (flower), grapefruit (flower), holy basil, lavender, lemon (flower), lemon balm, lemon myrtle, meadowsweet, peppermint, rose, rosemary, sage, tea tree, thyme



## Appendix 2: Juices

**F**ruit and vegetable juicing forms an integral chapter in naturopathic history. In Switzerland in the 1890s, well before the discovery of vitamins, Dr Max Bircher-Benner promoted the idea of eating raw food and drinking fruit and vegetable juices, proclaiming that eating 'living' food could influence illness. In possibly the world's first wholistic clinic, 'Life Force', Bircher-Benner incorporated exercise and psychotherapy (influenced by the work of Sigmund Freud) together with juicing. In New York in the 1940s, Dr Max Gerson ran a successful sanitarium that centred around juicing and hydrotherapy, to treat cancer and other illnesses. Well before his time, Gerson promoted the health benefits of eating organically grown food.

Fruit and vegetable juices provide an easily digested and concentrated source of vitamins, minerals, enzymes and other phytonutrients. However, juicing should never replace eating the 'real thing'. One reason is that juicing loses valuable fibre; additionally, it is important we chew our food to maintain a healthy digestive tract.

If you are a novice juicer, start with a 'base' juice of pear, carrot, orange or apple, and add from there. A general rule of thumb is to mix fruit with fruit, and vegetable with vegetable, however there are some delicious exceptions, for instance orange and carrot, and apple and celery. Be creative and playful and you will soon find a repertoire of juices to suit your mood and health. If the juice tastes too strong, dilute with water or increase the proportion of 'base' juice. Children love juices too; under the age of twelve, dilute with about one-third water.

Vegetable juices are quite filling and, if you are wishing to trim a few kilos, they make an excellent entrée before a meal.

## ALKALISING JUICE

One naturopathic theory holds that certain foods are acid-forming in the body and can cause health problems, including eczema, arthritis and even heart disease. The foods are not necessarily acidic to taste, but after digestion their by-products (metabolic ash) have a minuscule impact on the pH of the blood. Foods which are claimed to be acid-forming include meat, sugar and grains, particularly wheat. Alkalising foods are the fruits and vegetables. Even acid-tasting lemons are alkaline after digestion. Hence, all fruit and vegetable juices have an alkalising impact on the body (see box, page 48).

<b>Juice</b>	<b>Benefit</b>
Apple	Good for cholesterol, constipation and, diluted with water, good for diarrhoea. Green apples are usually used for juicing, send 'em in core and all.
Apricot	Apricots contain betacarotene and iron. Good for upset tummies, anaemia and cholesterol. Soak dried apricots if you can't find fresh.
Beetroot	Beetroot juice is strong to the taste and has an equally strong effect on the body. Rich in minerals and antioxidants, beetroot is a powerful blood 'tonic', helping to build up red blood cells.

	<p>Beetroot is recommended for liver conditions, lowered immunity and is often used in alternative cancer treatments. Beetroot juice is surprisingly sweet. It has a strong red colour which will also harmlessly colour the stool and urine, be warned! If you are a beginner juicer, start with a sixth of a raw beetroot and build up from there.</p>
Beetroot leaves	<p>It's not just a matter of waste not want not, beetroot leaves are a great source of magnesium, iron and chlorophyll.</p>
Cabbage	<p>Cabbage juice doesn't taste as bad as you'd think. On the other hand, it's not champagne. Cabbage is part of the brassica group (broccoli, brussels sprouts, etc.), known for its antioxidant and detoxifying effect. Cabbage is also good for healing ulcers affecting the gastrointestinal tract, liver problems and cancer protection.</p>
Carrot	<p>Carrot juice is the most popular vegetable juice because it tastes delicious. A good source of betacarotene (provitamin A),</p>

	<p>carrot juice helps heal mucous membranes of the intestinal tract, bladder and lungs, also for eye conditions. Carrot juice makes a great 'base' juice for others such as parsley, ginger, etc.</p>
Celery	<p>A little bitter, with a pleasant, savoury taste, celery is anti-inflammatory and calming to the nervous system. It's also diuretic (for fluid retention problems) and good for arthritis, kidney, bladder, cardiovascular and nervous system. Include celery tops as well.</p>
Cranberry	<p>Cranberries contain loads of vitamin C and antioxidants. Cranberry juice can help treat and guard against cystitis. Frozen cranberries can be used when fresh are thin on the ground. Have heard reports that it works well with vodka.</p>
Cucumber	<p>Cool as a cucumber indeed. Cucumber is a diuretic, helping with fluid retention. It helps cool the body in fever and menopause and is helpful for high blood pressure.</p>

Grapefruit	The bitter principle in grapefruit makes it excellent for liver and gallbladder conditions. It's also the classic weight-loss breakfast drink. Pink grapefruit contains lycopene, a substance known to help prevent prostate cancer. <i>Caution:</i> Grapefruit juice can interfere with some medications; check with your GP.
Lemon	A good source of vitamin C and bioflavonoids. Lemon juice is good for the skin, liver, constipation, veins and immune system. A time-honoured recipe is to drink the juice of half a lemon in hot water with honey first thing in the morning. Squeezing lemon juice over food increases iron availability.
Orange	A reliable source of vitamin C, orange juice is a familiar favourite. Helpful for immune system, colds, and increasing iron availability from food.
Papaya	Ripe papaya is an amazingly rich source of vitamin C, and the carotenoid pigments betacarotene and lycopene (in the redder varieties). This makes it a fruit valuable

	<p>for boosting the immune system, and useful in helping to prevent cancers.</p>
Parsley	<p>Although nominally a herb, parsley is often included in vegetable juices because of its high mineral content.</p>
Pear	<p>Pears are high in soluble fibre (so leave some pulp in the juice if possible), helpful for constipation and high cholesterol. Pears are one of the least allergenic foods.</p>
Pineapple	<p>Pineapple contains bromelain, an enzyme which helps reduce inflammation. Pineapple juice helps digestion, fluid retention, constipation and arthritis. Lovely with mint.</p>
Rockmelon	<p>Delicious, cooling and refreshing, rockmelon contains antioxidants that help lower cholesterol.</p>
Spinach	<p>A rich source of iron, magnesium and other minerals. Spinach is good for anaemia, constipation and period problems.</p>



## Appendix 3: Marijuana as medicine

**M**arijuana, *Cannabis sativa*, can be a very effective medicine for nausea and pain, particularly when the seriousness of the symptoms outweighs the risks of addiction or other side effects. Although legal in some European countries and US states, in Australia it is illegal to grow, possess or consume marijuana, so the information here is purely that, information.

Marijuana has been used for thousands of years. In ancient Indian medical texts marijuana was presented as a herb that ‘releases us from anxiety’. References in Chinese pharmacopoeias tell people to go lightly with the herb as taking too much makes ‘people see demons’. Cannabis was used by the Assyrians to relieve sorrow and guilt.

### **MEDICINAL USES**

The leaves and flowers of marijuana contain the mind-altering chemical THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol). Many drugs (recreational and medicinal) work via receptors and marijuana is no exception. Receptors are like miniature baseball mitts and are situated throughout the body, including the brain. THC, the active ‘addictive’ chemical in marijuana, behaves like a baseball and will head for the mitt (receptor site). The scientists who discovered these receptors must have been fans because they named the receptors ‘anandamide receptors’ after the Sanskrit word for bliss, *ananda*.

Taken at moderate levels, THC creates a feeling of wellbeing and relaxation. THC is fat-soluble, which means it will be stored in the fatty areas in the body, including the brain and fat deposits. A cause of concern is that it takes a long time for THC to be eliminated from the body.

Marijuana is both analgesic (painkilling) and anti-inflammatory, managing painful conditions including arthritis; chronic back, joint and muscle pain; and post-operative pain. Marijuana has been proven to be nearly as effective as morphine but without the unpleasant side effects of nausea and constipation. Marijuana is excellent for reducing nausea. It is also effective for reducing pressure within the eye, a cause of glaucoma, the most common cause of blindness in the Western world. Marijuana is also reported to be of use in the relief of MS symptoms, including muscle weakness, pain, shakiness and muscle spasms.

Cannabis seeds contain an excellent array of essential fatty acids, and are relatively low in THC.

On the downside, marijuana is addictive, although less so than alcohol and nicotine. It is a trigger for mental illness, including anxiety, depression and psychosis. And it also reduces fertility and affects the unborn baby.



## **Appendix 4: Suppliers and other useful contacts**

The ABC is not responsible for the content found on non-ABC internet sites referred to in this book or referred to on related websites.

### **ABC Gardening Australia**

[www.abc.net.au/gardening/](http://www.abc.net.au/gardening/)

A terrific resource with fact sheets and information from the *Gardening Australia* ABC show. Well worth a visit.

### **Agroforestry**

[www.agroforestry.net.au](http://www.agroforestry.net.au)

The Otway Agroforestry Network

55 Main Street,

Birregurra VIC 3242

(no phone)

Website about growing trees. It contains a very good section on growing shiitake mushrooms.

### **All Rare Herbs**

[www.allrareherbs.com.au](http://www.allrareherbs.com.au)

PO Box 91

Mapleton QLD 4560

Phone 07 5446 9243

Fax 07 5446 9277

This mail-order company stocks a large range of herb plants and seeds.

### **Austral Herbs**

[www.australherbs.com.au](http://www.australherbs.com.au)

PO Box 22

Uralla NSW 2358

Phone 02 6778 7357

Fax 02 6778 7352

One of the largest ranges of dried herbs available in Australia.

### **Daleys Fruit Tree Nursery**

[www.daleysfruit.com.au](http://www.daleysfruit.com.au)

36 Daleys Lane

Geneva via Kyogle NSW 2474

Phone 02 6632 1441

Fax 02 6632 2585

Unusual Australian native and rainforest plants.

### **The Digger's Club**

[www.diggers.com.au](http://www.diggers.com.au)

PO Box 300

Dromana VIC 3936

Phone 03 5984 7900

Fax 03 5987 2398

Mail-order club offering unusual fruit, flower, herb and culinary plants and seeds for sale. Join the Digger's Club for excellent gardening information.

### **Four Seasons Herbs**

[www.fourseasonsherbs.com.au](http://www.fourseasonsherbs.com.au)

PO Box 110

Exeter TAS 7275

Phone 0412 721 268

Heirloom varieties and unusual edible plants and herbs.

**New Directions Australia**

[www.newdirections.com.au](http://www.newdirections.com.au)

47 Carrington Road

Marrickville NSW 2204

Phone 02 8577 5999

Fax 02 8577 5977

Stockists of dried herbs, oils, essential oils. Also offer workshops on making cosmetics with essential oils.

**Origin Seeds**

[www.originseed.com.au](http://www.originseed.com.au)

PO Box 2840

Toowoomba BC QLD 4350

Phone 07 3056 021

Fax 07 3103 4506

Wide range of seeds, flowers, herbs, trees and vegetables.

**Perfect Potion**

[www.perfectpotion.com.au](http://www.perfectpotion.com.au)

Reply Paid 27

3Zillmere QLD 4034

Phone 1800 988 999

Sells essential oils, some dried herbs. Has many retail outlets throughout Australia.

**Pleasance Herbs**

[www.pleasanceherbs.com.au](http://www.pleasanceherbs.com.au)

PO Box 190

Dee Why NSW 2099

Supplier of organic medicinal and culinary seeds.

### **Seed Savers**

[www.seedsavers.net](http://www.seedsavers.net)

A wonderful charitable and educational organisation. Aims to create a seed bank of all non-hybrid plants, and also conducts research into these areas. Excellent source of information on cultivation and propagation.

### **Select Organic**

[www.selectorganic.com.au/content/default.asp](http://www.selectorganic.com.au/content/default.asp)

M.S. 905

Lower Beechmont QLD 4211

Phone 07 5533 1177

Fax 07 5533 1108

Seeds for culinary and medicinal plants.

### **Woodbridge Fruit Trees**

[www.woodbridgefruittrees.com.au](http://www.woodbridgefruittrees.com.au)

PO Box 95

Woodbridge TAS 7160

(no phone)

Fruit tree specialists. Website contains good information on growing fruit trees.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to those at ABC Books and HarperCollins — Karen Penning, Katie Stackhouse, Lydia Papandrea and especially to John Mapps. Kym and Sally Grant — proprietors of Austral Herbs and good guys. Jenny Price — gifted naturopath, your support and advice have been invaluable. I look forward to seeing your star ascend. Greg Ockenden — your insistent suggestion that I ‘don’t worry, be happy’ is as annoying as it is true. Katrina Endean (one heck of a chef and gardener) — your friendship sustains me. Janet Walker — co-owner (with Dazz) of Village Green Nursery, thanks for the encouragement, friendship, advice and contributions about climate zones and growing. Thanks to the Bureau of Meteorology for permission to adapt the climate zones map on page 13 that appears on the bureau’s website: <http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/environ/travel/map.shtml>. Linda van Niekerk — always spot on with your evaluation, friendship and support. Benyhton Oldfield, my agent — thank you for your guidance. Rob Santich, leading herbal educator and herbal manufacturer — I appreciate your feedback. Laura Wilson — fine herbalist, herb grower and medicine maker. Bill Alldritt — thanks for everything.

## Bibliography

- Alexander, Stephanie. *The Cook's Companion*. Penguin Lantern, Australia 2004
- Alexander, Stephanie. *Kitchen Garden Companion*. Penguin Lantern, Australia 2009
- Beer, Maggie. *Maggie's Harvest*. Penguin Lantern, Australia 2007
- Beim, Mim. *Tea Health & Happiness*. Ripe off the Press, Australia 2008
- Bennett, Peter. *Organic Gardening* (6th edition). New Holland, Australia 1999
- Bone, Kerry. *A Clinical Guide to Blending Liquid Herbs*. Churchill Livingstone, US 2003
- Bone, Kerry and Morgan, Michelle. 'Green Tea and Garlic as Cardiovascular Life Extension Strategies.' *Mediherb: A Phytotherapist's Perspective*, No. 67. December 2005
- Carper, Jean. *The Food Pharmacy*. Simon & Schuster, UK 1989
- Chiej, Roberto. *The Macdonald Encyclopedia of Medicinal Plants*. Macdonald, UK 1984
- Cundall, Peter. *The Practical Australian Gardener*. Penguin, Australia 1989
- David, Elizabeth. *French Provincial Cooking*. Penguin Michael Joseph, UK 1960
- Davidson, Alan. *The Penguin Companion to Food*. Penguin, UK 2002
- De Bairaclı Levy, Juliette. *The Illustrated Herbal Handbook*. Readers Union, UK 1974

- Diego M.A. et al. 'Aromatherapy Positively Affects Mood.' *International Journal of Neuroscience* (1988), 96: 217–24
- Fanton, Michel and Jude. *The Seed Savers' Handbook*. The Seed Savers' Network, Byron Bay, Australia 1993
- Hall, Dorothy. *The Book of Herbs*. Pan Books, UK 1972
- Hill, J. *The Family Herbal*. 1755. (free online version)
- Hoffman, David. *The Holistic Herbal* (2nd edition). Findhorn Press, UK 1986
- Little, Brenda. *Companion Planting in Australia*. Reed, Australia 1982
- McGee, Harold. *On Food & Cooking, An Encyclopaedia of Kitchen Science, History and Culture*. Hodder & Stoughton, UK 2004
- McMaugh, Judy. *What Garden Pest or Disease is That?* New Holland, Australia 2000
- Mills, Simon Y. *Out of the Earth: The Essential Book of Herbal Medicine*. Viking Penguin, UK 1991
- Mills, Simon and Bone, Kerry. *The Essential Guide to Herbal Safety*. Elsevier, USA 2005
- Mills, Simon and Bone, Kerry. *Principles and Practice of Phytotherapy*. Churchill Livingstone, UK 2000
- Morgan, Michelle. 'Holy Basil.' *Mediherb: A Phytotherapist's Perspective*, No 19. Australia, September 2001
- Morgan, Michelle. 'Immune Enhancing and Tonic Activity of Reishi and Shiitake.' *Mediherb: A Phytotherapist's Perspective*, No. 64. Australia. November 2005
- Murray, Michael T. *The Healing Power of Foods*. Prima Publishing, USA 1993
- Nagourney, Robert A. 'Garlic. Medicinal Food or Nutritious Medicine.' *Journal of Medicinal Food*. (Spring 1998), 1(1): 13–28. doi:10.1089/jmf.1998.1.13.

- Okeniyi, J.A., Ogunlesi, T.A., Oyelami, O.A., Adeyemi, L.A., 'Effectiveness of Dried Carica Papaya Seeds Against Human Intestinal Parasitosis: A Pilot Study.' *Journal of Medicinal Food* (2007), 10(1): 194–6. PMID: 17472487.
- Oliver, Jamie. *Jamie at Home: Cook Your Way to the Good Life*. Penguin Michael Joseph, UK 2001
- Pavard, Anna. *The Naming of Names: The Search for Order in the World of Plants*. Bloomsbury, UK 2005
- Pengelly, Andrew. *The Constituents of Medicinal Plants: An Introduction to the Chemistry and Therapeutics of Herbal Medicine* (2nd edition). Allen & Unwin, Australia 2004
- Premier, Robert. 'Phytochemical Composition: A Paradigm Shift for Food-Health Considerations.' *Asia Pacific Journal of Clinical Nutrition* (2002), 11(S6): S197–S201
- Thun M.J., Peto R., Lopez A.D., Monaco J.H., Henley J, Heath C.W., Doll R. 'Alcohol Consumption and Mortality Among Middle-Aged and Elderly U.S. Adults.' *New England Journal of Medicine* (1977), 279: 535–40
- Toussaint-Samat, Maguelonne. *History of Food*. Blackwell, UK 1992
- Whitten, Greg. *Herbal Harvest* (3rd edition). Blooming's Books Melbourne, Australia 2004
- Wong, James. *Grow Your Own Drugs*. Collins, UK 2009

## Websites

Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database:  
[www.naturaldatabase.com](http://www.naturaldatabase.com)

University of Maryland Medical Center Complementary and Alternative Medicine Index (CAM:) [www.umm.edu/altmed](http://www.umm.edu/altmed)

## INDEX

**Bold page numbers refer to main plant entries in An A to Z of Medicinal Plants**

The pagination of this electronic edition does not match the edition from which it was created. To locate a specific passage, please use the search feature of your ebook reader.

### A

abscesses 52, 83, 113

acetic acid 80

acetylsalicylic acid 179

*Achillea millefolium* (yarrow) 254

acidopholus powder 56

acne 77, 83, 84, 112, 113, 184, 242

adaptogen 151, 151–2

adrenal gland 175

adrenaline 175

alfalfa 11, **46–50**, 232

alkalising foods 47, 49, 262

alkaloid 212

allantoin 101

all heal 152 *see also* valerian

*Allium cepa* (onion) 192

*Allium sativum* (garlic) 123

*Aloe barbadensis* (aloe vera) 50

aloe vera 50–3, 156  
Alzheimer's disease 72, 73, 116, 133, 171, 189, 222, 226, 227  
*Amanita phalloides* (death cap mushroom) 236  
ammonium (nitrogen) 10  
anaemia 60, 145, 184, 200, 231  
anal fissures 52, 211, 255  
analgesic 267  
andrographus 58  
angina 59, 60  
antacid 178  
anthocyanins 70, 80, 141, 142, 214  
anti-ageing 139  
antibacterial 47, 83, 115, 149, 151, 189, 192, 226, 234, 241, 243, 244  
antibiotic 51, 124, 125, 154, 173, 181  
antifungal 39, 47, 51, 56, 241  
anti-inflammatory 51, 54, 56, 83, 89, 129, 178, 193, 250, 255, 264, 267  
antimicrobial 83, 123, 144, 145, 208, 223  
antioxidants 54, 65, 69, 70, 80, 124, 136, 141, 142, 145, 169, 189, 208, 222, 223, 231, 238, 238–40, 250, 265, 266, 267  
antispasmodic 39, 89, 118, 129, 162, 165, 203, 205  
antiviral 47, 151, 189, 214, 228  
ants 23  
anxiety 162, 165, 203, 219, 234, 252  
anxiety 72, 73, 86, 104, 105, 105, 161, 162  
aphids 23, 75, 137, 182, 201, 220, 249  
aphrodisiacs 104–5, 162  
*Apis mellifera* (honey) 154

apple 53–7, 64, 156, 262  
apple cider vinegar 55, 56  
apricot 262  
*Arctium gobo* (burdock) 77  
*Arctium lappa* (burdock) 77  
arnica 102  
aromatherapy 218  
arthritis 32, 37, 47, 48, 62, 77, 92, 95, 112, 121, 122, 129, 130, 131, 174, 178, 179, 184, 196, 200, 211, 223, 224, 229, 238, 247, 250, 255, 267  
arthritis, psoriatic 77  
artichoke  
    globe 106, 135–7, 145, 237, 249  
    Jerusalem 156–60  
    sunflower 156  
    *see also* Jerusalem artichoke ascorbic acid 169  
*Asimina triloba* (pawpaw) 197  
Aspergillus 146  
asthma 54, 55, 92, 112, 113, 121, 151, 205, 206, 176, 193, 217, 219, 247, 248  
astragalus 57–60, 123, 150, 152 156  
*Astragalus membranaceus* (astragalus) 58  
*Astragalus propinquus* (astragalus) 58  
astringent 115, 208, 218, 219, 226, 255  
atherosclerosis 54, 55, 67, 193, 222  
autoimmune 112, 229, 238  
avocado 60–4, 187  
Ayurvedic medicine 150, 152, 175, 230

## **B**

Backhouse, James 172  
*Backhousia citriodora* (lemon myrtle) 173  
*Bacopa monnieri* (brahmi) 72, 226  
bad breath 199, 200, 243, 245  
balm 170 *see also* lemon balm bark 14, 15, 30, 31, 33, 100, 177  
barley 11  
baths 33, 34, 40, 89, 90, 130, 131, 166, 206, 224, 253  
beet *see* beetroot beetroot 22, **64–68**, 74, 79, 263  
Bell's palsy 72, 73  
benign prostatic hyperplasia 185  
berries 53, 141  
*Beta vulgaris* (beetroot) 64  
betacarotene 61, 107, 195, 231  
betacyanin 65  
biliary colic 205  
bioflavonoids 149, 194  
Bircher-Benner, Max 65, 261  
bisabolol 89  
bites, insect 242  
black cohosh 226 black forest mushroom 228  
*see also* shiitake mushroom bladder 145, 184, 199, 244, 263, 264  
blepharitis 115, 116  
bloating 47, 90, 108, 118, 119, 121, 130, 135, 196, 205, 217, 219, 222, 224, 255  
blood and bone 10  
blood glucose 51, 158, 159  
blueberry/bilberry **69–71**  
body odour 199, 200  
boils 37, 77, 78, 83, 84, 92, 112, 113, 211

bones 48, 101, 102, 139, 140  
borax 23  
boron 10  
borscht 67–8  
bowel 54, 77, 80, 89, 90, 109, 125, 129, 146, 157, 162, 165, 203, 252  
brain garden 260  
brahmi 71–3, 132, 226  
*Brassica oleracea capitata* (cabbage) 79  
*Brassica oleracea italica* (broccoli) 74  
bridewort 177  
    *see also* meadowsweet  
British Herbal Pharmacopoeia 104  
broad beans 22, 64  
broccoli 22, 74–6  
bronchitis 95, 113, 125, 151, 173, 174, 181, 217, 219, 245  
brussels sprouts 22, 75  
buffalo grass 46  
burdock 76–8, 135  
burns 51, 83, 92, 155, 165, 181, 184, 189, 190, 234, 242

## C

cabbage 22, 64, 75, 78–82, 210, 263  
cabbage white butterflies 23, 75  
caffeine 140  
calcium 10, 107, 124, 199, 231  
calendula 50, 56, 76, 79, 82–5, 91, 101, 111, 115, 123, 138, 154, 175, 180, 187, 216, 226, 241, 244, 245, 254  
calendula cream 84

*Calendula officinalis* (calendula) 82, 83  
California poppy **85–7**, 120, 164, 202, 233, 251  
*Camellia sinesis* 34  
cancer 47, 55, 142, 145, 208, 214, 229, 231, 238, 247, 248  
*Candida albicans* 56, 145, 173,  
candida 113, 146, 173, 174, 223, 242 *see also* thrush  
*Cannabis sativa* (marijuana) 266  
capsaicin 93, 94  
capsicum 22  
*Capsicum annuum* (chilli) 94  
capsules 35, 36–7, 60, 73, 78, 83, 84, 87, 90, 92, 105, 109, 110,  
113, 116, 119, 121, 122, 129, 131, 134, 137, 140, 143, 149, 152,  
163, 165, 172, 174, 177, 179, 190, 203, 206, 215, 220, 224, 227,  
229, 235, 238, 245, 250, 253, 256  
carbohydrate 157, 158, 159  
carbuncles 211  
carcinogens 75, 239  
*Carica papaya* (papaya) 195  
carminative 171, 222  
carnosol 222  
carotenoid 195, 231, 247  
carp, minced 10  
carrot 22, 64, 263  
Carthaginian apple 207  
    *see also* pomegranate  
carvacol 244  
Castaneda, Carlos 104  
catalase 239  
cataracts 61, 62, 75, 247, 248

catarrh 244  
catechins 240  
caterpillars 23, 24, 25, 76, 81, 144, 249  
cauliflower 22, 64, 75  
celery 64, 74, 128, 183, 264  
*Centella asiatica* (gotu kola) 138  
chai 99–100  
*Chamaemelum nobile* (Roman chamomile) 88  
chamazulene 89  
chamomile (German) 74, 81, **88–91**, 118, 170, 204, 251  
Champlain, Samuel de 158  
chickenpox 89, 90, 171, 176, 234, 235  
chickweed **91–3**  
chilblains 95, 99, 130  
chilli 93–7, 128, 132  
chilli cream 41, 96  
Chinese black mushroom 228  
    *see also* shiitake mushroom  
chlorella 232  
chlorophyll 66, 184, 199, 231, 232  
cholecystokinin (CKK) 211  
cholesterol 47, 48, 54, 55, 61, 62, 66, 99, 109, 124, 125, 130, 136,  
137, 188, 237, 238, 247, 248, 250, 262, 265  
Chronic Fatigue Syndrome 58, 59, 229  
*Chrysanthemum cinerariaefolium*  
26  
*Cinnamomum cassia* (cinnamon)  
98  
*Cinnamomum zeylanicum* (cinnamon) 97

cinnamon 94, **97–100**, 156  
circulation 70, 94, 95, 98, 105, 130, 133, 162, 181, 222, 223, 224  
cirrhosis 35, 137, 238  
citra 173  
citric acid 169  
*Citrus limon* (lemon) 167  
*Citrus x paradise* (grapefruit) 145  
cleavers 76, 77, 135, 198  
climate 12–4  
clover, red 11, 117  
cobalt 10  
cold sores 171, 174, 190, 234, 235  
    *see also* herpes  
colds & flus 59, 95, 98, 99, 113, 115, 116, 121, 124, 125, 130, 149,  
151, 152, 168, 171, 173, 174, 181, 189, 190, 193, 205, 218, 219,  
244, 245, 255, 265  
colic 89, 90, 98, 99, 118, 119, 125, 130, 165, 171, 205  
colitis 51, 90, 211,  
collagen 139, 142  
comfrey 8, 61, 91, 100–3, 138  
common nettle 183  
    *see also* nettle  
compost 6–9, 10  
compost activators 260  
compress 33, 34, 37–8, 76, 78, 83, 84, 89, 90, 92, 93, 94, 96, 102,  
111, 113, 128, 131, 140, 172, 179, 185, 203, 206, 224, 227, 234,  
235, 242, 256  
conjunctivitis 84, 90, 113, 115, 116  
constipation 54, 55, 77, 88, 105, 108, 109, 136, 143, 146, 149, 157,  
162, 168, 176, 189, 196, 222, 255, 262, 264, 265, 267

copper 10  
cortisol 129, 175, 176  
coughs 92, 98, 113, 121, 122, 124, 125, 130, 149, 151, 152, 168, 176, 193, 194, 205, 206, 218, 219, 244, 245  
counterirritants 95  
cradle cap 189, 190  
cramps 37, 98, 99, 129, 130, 131, 162, 163  
cranberry 264  
creams 33, 37, 40, 41–2, 83, 84, 90, 92, 93, 94, 96, 101, 102, 113, 114, 140, 165, 172, 174, 177, 179, 182, 183, 219, 224, 235, 243, 250  
Crohn's disease 112, 211  
crop rotation 21–2  
cucumber 22, 266  
Culpeper, Nicholas 34, 116  
*Curcuma longa* (turmeric) 249  
curcumin 240 cuts 83, 84, 102, 165, 242, 255  
cuttings 5, 17, 18, 120, 122, 135, 144, 163, 166, 172, 174, 204  
*Cynara cardunculus* (globe artichoke) 135  
*Cynara scolymus* (globe artichoke) 135  
cynarin 136  
cystitis 104, 105, 113, 168, 185, 200, 264  
    *see also* infections, urinary

## D

damiana 103–6, 216, 233  
dandelion 106–10, 135, 145, 198, 221, 249  
dandelion root 74, 79, 109, 180, 237  
dandruff 181, 184, 186  
decoction *see* tea decongestant 181

delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) 266, 267  
dementia 72, 73, 133  
depression 104, 105, 165, 171, 217, 218, 219, 233, 234, 269  
dermatitis 84, 122  
derris dust 26  
detox garden 259  
detox juice 67  
detoxing 66, 67,75, 77, 80, 124, 125, 222, 224, 240, 259, 263  
diabetes 51, 54, 70, 75, 98, 99, 157, 158, 159, 175, 184, 238  
diabetic neuropathy 133, 143  
diabetic retinopathy 133, 143  
diarrhoea 54, 55, 70, 90, 99, 129, 130, 142, 143, 163, 179, 205,  
208, 214, 217, 219, 255, 262  
digestion 47, 48, 55, 89, 98, 99, 104, 105, 107, 108, 109, 121, 129,  
145, 171, 179, 181, 196, 206, 222, 224, 250, 265  
digestive garden 261  
Dioscorides 116  
diseases 22, 48, 238,  
Doctrine of Signatures 116–7  
dolomite 82  
dosage 32  
dramatic garden 259  
drying 31–2  
dyspepsia 119

## E

*E.coli* 145

echinacea 56, 58, 59, 77, **111–4**,  
115, 123, 150, 156, 180, 187, 216, 226, 233, 241, 244, 245, 254

*Echinacea angustifolia* (echinacea) 111

*Echinacea pupurea* (echinacea) 111

eczema 32, 37, 52, 62, 77, 78, 89, 90, 92, 136, 137, 139, 140, 184, 185, 189, 190, 219, 242, 243, 250, 262

edible flower garden 258

eggplant 22

ellagic acid 214

endocrine glands 158

endometriosis 222, 224

enema 89, 90

English lavender 164

*see also* lavender

English spinach 230

*see also* spinach

epicatechin 54

epilepsy 73

erectile dysfunction 133, 208

*see also* impotence

*Eschscholzia californica* (California poppy) 85

*Euphrasia officinalis* (eyebright) 115

Evelyn, John 170

extract *see* tincture eyebright 59, 69, 111, **114–7**

## **F**

fairy clock (dandelion) 106

fatigue 58, 59, 66, 151, 229

fennel **117–20**, 237

fertilisers 9–12

fever 95, 120, 121, 151, 171, 189, 190, 255, 265

glandular 84, 113,  
feverfew **120–2**  
fibre 61, 65  
fibroids 222, 224, 255  
*Filipendula ulmaria* (meadowsweet) 178  
fish emulsion 10  
flatulence 89, 90, 99, 108, 118, 119, 121, 130, 136, 157, 165, 171,  
196, 200, 205, 222, 224, 255  
flower garden 258  
flowers 31, 33, 34, 172, 181, 266  
fluid retention (oedema) 107, 109, 136, 137, 200, 264, 265  
*Foeniculum vulgare* (fennel) 118  
folic acid (Vitamin B9) 65, 231  
Four Thieves Vinegar 126  
free radicals 139  
freezing 32  
fructooligosaccharides (FOS) 105  
fruit fly 24  
fungi 6, 24, 123, 173, 228, 230, 242  
furanocoumarin 201

## **G**

gai lan 75  
galactagogue 184, 200, 238  
Galen (Aelius Galenus) 199  
gallbladder 108, 145, 238, 250, 264  
gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) 86, 87  
gardening, container 5–6  
gargle 33, 84, 113, 162, 208, 226, 245

garlic 53, 111, **123–7**, 145, 148, 175, 180, 187, 192, 241, 246  
gastritis 75, 83, 96, 139, 176, 211, 245  
gastrointestinal tract 51, 54, 83, 211, 263  
gathering 30–1  
Gattefosse, Rene Maurice 21  
gentian 109  
Gerard, John 120  
Gerson, Max 261  
ginger 67, 94, 95, 115, **127–32**,  
132, 150, 178, 183, 202, 204, 213, 214, 254  
ginger poultice 131  
gingerol 130  
gingivitis 58, 151, 155, 234, 245  
    *see also* gums  
ginkgo 72, 116, **132–5**, 138, 221, 226  
*Ginkgo biloba* (ginkgo) 133  
ginkgo nuts 134  
ginseng, Korean 152  
ginseng, Siberian 59, 150, 152  
glaucoma 70, 267  
glucosinates 74, 75, 80  
glucosinolates 196  
glycaemic index 158–60  
glycosides 181  
*Glycyrrhiza glabra* (*Liquiritia officinalis*) (licorice) 175  
glycyrrhizin 174  
goitrogens 80  
goldenseal 109, 115, 175, 210  
gotu kola 50, 69, 72, 91, 132,

138–40, 152, 154, 183, 221, 226  
gout 48, 77, 92, 184, 211, 223, 224  
grape 141–4  
grapefruit 108, 144–7, 240, 247, 260, 264  
Green, James 108  
gremolata 201  
grenadine and gin cocktail 209  
grenadine cordial 209  
gums 83, 208, 226, 227, 242, 256  
    *see also* gingivitis

## H

haemorrhoids 52, 70, 92, 95, 143, 224, 255  
Hamilton Anxiety Scale 86  
hangover 238  
hay 14  
hayfever 113, 115, 116, 121  
headaches 86, 121, 162, 165, 171, 178,  
179, 203, 205, 206, 224, 252  
heart disease 54, 58, 61, 80, 124, 125, 130, 136, 141, 142, 143,  
149, 151, 176, 188, 189, 193, 208, 215, 224, 238, 239, 240, 247,  
250, 262,  
heartburn 179, 205  
    *see also* reflux  
*Helianthus tuberosus* 156  
*Helicobacter pylori* 75, 244  
hematocrit 145  
hepatitis 109, 137, 222, 234,  
herbal bitters 108–9  
herpes 51, 52, 171, 173, 189, 234  
genital 155, 171, 174, 176, 190, 234, 235

hibiscus **148–50**

*Hibiscus sabdariffa* (hibiscus) 148, 149

high blood pressure (hypertension) 107, 109, 124, 125, 136, 137, 149, 162, 163, 190, 196, 203, 208, 255

Hill, John 225

holy basil **150–3**, 246

honey 62, 148, **153–6**, 167

hops 164, 202, 252

horse chestnut 132

horticulturalists 4

hot flushes 205, 206, 226, 227

*huang qi* 58

*see also* astragalus

Hungary Water 223

*Hydrocotyll asiatica* (gotu kola) 138

hydrogen peroxide 154

hydrosol 40

hygroscopic 134

hyperhidrosis (excess sweating) 226, 227

*Hypericum perforatum* (St John's wort) 233, 235

hypertension *see* high blood pressure hypoglycaemia 158

hypotension 223, 224

*see also* low blood pressure

## I

immune garden 259

immune system 54, 58, 59, 112, 113, 123, 125, 149, 151, 157, 181, 192, 196, 218, 229, 239, 264, 265

impotence 105, 218

*see also* erectile dysfunction

Indian pennywort (*see also* gotu kola) 138

indigestion 47, 48, 55, 90, 121, 171, 179, 196

*see also* reflux, heartburn

indole-3-carbinol 240

indoles 74

infection

bacterial 146

fungal 146, 245

respiratory 244

urinary 245

Inflammatory Bowel Disease 54, 179

influenza 58, 59, 95, 99, 112, 121, 125, 151, 171, 174, 189, 190, 255,

*see also* colds and flu

infusion 40–1, 42

insomnia 73, 86, 162, 174, 202, 203, 205, 234, 252, 253

*see also* sleep

insulin 157, 158

intestines 108

iron 10, 107, 108, 124, 184, 199, 231

irritability 139, 171, 203, 252

Irritable Bowel Syndrome 54, 86, 89, 90, 99, 119, 129, 130, 157, 162, 203, 205, 252

isoflavone 47

isothiocyanates 74

## **J**

jaundice 109, 116, 127, 136, 238, 250

juices 261–7

## **K**

kava 128, **160–3**, 164, 233, 251

keloid scarring 139

kidneys 66, 77, 107, 199, 200

## **L**

lactic acid 80

lactobacillus 80

laryngitis 226

*Lavandula angustifolia* (lavender)

164

lavender 21, 39, 40, **164–6**, 216, 233

laxative 51, 77, 149, 176

L-canavanine 47

leaves 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 50, 66, 67, 68, 70, 76, 92, 101, 102, 103, 104, 107, 110, 116, 119, 121, 122, 137, 138, 140, 142, 152, 172, 174, 180, 181, 182, 184, 185, 186, 187, 190, 200, 206, 215, 232, 242, 256, 263, 266

lemon 2, 156, **167–70**, 264

lemon balm 118, 170–2

lemon iron wood 173

*see also* lemon myrtle

lemon myrtle **172–4**

lentinan 228

*Lentinula edodes* (shiitake mushroom) 228

leukopenia 60

licorice 46, 59, 148, 152, **174–7**,

178

ligaments 139, 140

linalool 39, 165  
Linnaeus, Carlus (Carl) 4  
lion's tooth (dandelion) 106  
liver 35, 40, 65, 66, 75, 77, 80, 104, 107, 108, 109, 136, 145, 146,  
168, 181, 217, 222, 223, 224, 236, 237, 250  
longevity garden 260  
lucerne 14, 46  
lungs 26, 54, 77, 94, 99, 104, 176, 181, 193, 244, 263  
    *see also* respiratory system  
lupins 11  
lupus 112, 229  
lutein 61  
Lybian apple 207  
    *see also* pomegranate  
lycopene 145, 195, 240, 247  
*Lycopersicon esculentum* (tomato) 246

## **M**

macular degeneration 61, 62, 75, 143, 247, 248  
magnesium 10, 65, 66, 107, 184, 199, 231  
maidenhair tree (*see also* ginkgo) 133  
*Malus domestica* (apple) 53  
manganese 10  
manure 7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 71, 82, 137, 160, 213, green 11, 50  
marigolds 21, 82, 201  
marijuana 266–7  
mastitis 80, 81, 113  
*Materia Medica* 116, 127  
*Matricaria recutita* (German chamomile) 88

meadowsweet 46, **177–80**  
mealy bugs 24  
measles 89, 90  
*Medicago sativa* (alfalfa) 46  
medicinal gardens 258–61  
*Melaleuca alternifolia* (tea tree) 241, 242  
melissa 170  
    *see also* lemon balm  
*Melissa officinalis* (lemon balm) 170  
memory 133, 139, 224, 226, 227  
menopause 47, 205, 206, 226, 227, 234  
menstruation 214, 218, 219  
    *see also* periods  
*Mentha x piperita* (peppermint) 204  
menthol 205  
microflora 54  
migraine 86, 120, 121, 122  
mildew, powdery 24  
milk vetch 58  
    *see also* astragalus  
miscarriage 214  
molybdenum 10  
mood-enhancing garden 259  
mood swings 234  
More, Thomas 223–4  
morning sickness 129, 130, 214  
    *see also* nausea  
mother and baby garden 259  
motion sickness 129, 130

*see also* nausea

mouthwash 33, 208, 227, 245

mucolytic 124, 193

mucous membranes 51, 55, 89, 115, 176, 193, 205, 226, 263,

mucus 95, 124, 193, 244

mulch 5, 6, 14–5, 25, 68, 82, 93, 137, 147, 169, 174, 215, 249,

Multiple Sclerosis (MS) 267

mustard seed 11, 95

myometrium 214

myopia 70

## N

nappy rash 83, 84, 89, 90, 189, 190

nasturtiums 53, 74

nausea 66, 99, 121, 129, 130, 205, 266, 267

*see also* morning sickness, motion sickness

neroli 39

nerves 72, 165, 252

nervous breakdown 73

nervous system 72, 162, 218, 264

nervousness 205, 234

nettle hair and scalp lotion 186

nettle soup 185–6

nettles 8, 76, 77, 95, 132, 135, 156, **183–7**

nipples, cracked 84

nitrogen 10, 11, 22

nosebleeds 70, 255, 256

## O

*Ocimum sanctum* (holy basil) 150

*Ocimum tenuiflorum* (holy basil) 150

oesophagitis 211

oil

almond 39, 41

coconut 41

essential 39–40

jojoba 39, 41

olive 38, 39, 61, 169, 188, 189, 190, 230

ointment 29, 96

*Olea europaea* (olive) 188

oleic acid 188

oleuropein 189

Oligomeric proanthocyanins (OPCs) 142

Olive 108, **187–91**, 216

oil omega-three 116

onion 22, 64, 74, **192–4**, 246

onion cough remedy 194

orange 265

osteoarthritis 61, 130

osteoporosis 47, 48, 176,

oxalic acid 60

oxygen 239

## **P**

pain

abdominal 203, 217, 219

chronic 86, 267

joint 121, 131, 222

*Panax ginseng* 103, 105

pancreas 108, 158, 159  
papain 196  
papaw 195 *see also* papaya  
papaya 141, **195–7**, 265  
Paracelsus 116, 170  
parainfluenza virus 234  
Parkinson's disease 189  
parsley 64, 124, **198–201**, 246, 265  
parsley tea 200  
*Passiflora edulis* 204  
*Passiflora incarnata* (passionflower) 202  
passionflower 85, 161, 164, 175, **202–4**, 233, 251, 253  
pawpaw 195  
*see also* papaya  
pear 265  
peas 11, 22  
pectin 54  
pelvic muscles 214  
penicillin 228  
*Penicillium chrysogenum* 228  
peppermint 74, 128, 170, 178, 204–6, 213, 214  
periods  
    heavy 142, 143, 214, 217, 219, 255  
    painful 37, 86, 129, 130, 131, 162, 163, 203, 217, 219, 255  
peripheral neuropathy 72, 73  
*Persea Americana* (avocado) 61  
pests & diseases 22–7, 57, 76, 82,  
91, 182, 227  
*Petroselinum crispum* (parsley) 198

*Petroselinum neapolitanum* (parsley) 198  
pharyngitis 84, 113, 208  
phosphorus 10, 107, 124  
phu 252  
    *see also* valerian  
phylloxera 144  
phytohormone 118  
pimples 242  
pineapple 265  
*Piper methysticum* (kava) 161, 163  
*pissenlit* (dandelion) 106  
pituitary gland 158  
planting, companion 21  
Pliny the Elder 116, 128  
PMS 107, 109, 136, 137, 222, 224  
Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome 176  
polyphenol 208  
pomegranate **207–9**, 258  
potassium 10, 107, 231, 247  
potassium chloride 10  
potassium sulphate 10  
potato 22, **210–3**  
poultices 33, 37, 38–9, 41, 62, 78, 83, 84, 90, 93, 101, 102, 113, 121, 122, 129, 131, 140, 190, 193, 203, 211, 212, 227, 234, 235, 256  
pregnancy 214, 231  
propagation 17–9, 52, 91, 114, 163, 166, 174, 177  
prostate 47, 74, 145, 146, 184, 196, 240, 247, 248, 264  
prostatitis 185

protein 108  
psoriasis 52, 62, 77, 78, 90, 92, 109, 136, 137, 139, 140, 222, 250  
pumpkin 22  
*Punica granatum* (pomegranate) 207  
punicalagin 208  
purple coneflower (see *also* echinacea) 111  
pyrethrum 23, 24, 26–7

## Q

quercetin 54  
queen of the meadow 178  
*see also* meadowsweet

## R

rashes 92, 181, 184, 185, 234, 235  
*see also* nappy  
rash raspberry 184, **213–5**  
Raynaud's syndrome 70, 133  
red sorrel (see *also* hibiscus) 148  
reflux 47, 90, 205, 211, 222, 247  
*see also* heartburn  
reishi 228  
relaxation and sleep garden 259  
retinitis 70  
rhodiola 152  
ringworm 125  
rockmelon 265  
root division 18–9, 90, 163, 172, 177, 180, 186, 206, 227, 236, 253  
root ginger (see *also* ginger) 128  
*Rosa canina* (dog rose) 216

*Rosa damascena* (damask rose, rose of Castille) 216  
*Rosa gallica officinalis* (apothecary's rose, Gallic or French rose) 216  
rose 39, 40, **216–20**, 233  
rose petal 216, 217  
rosebud 216, 217  
rosehip 216, 218 roselle (see *also* hibiscus) 148  
rosemary 81, 204, **221–5**  
*Rosmarinus officinalis* (rosemary) 221, 225  
*Rubus idaeus* (raspberry) 213

## **S**

sacred basil (see *also* holy basil) 150  
sage 74, 81, 204, 216, **225–7**  
salad garden 258  
salicylates 178, 179  
salmonella 145  
*Salvia officinalis* (sage) 226  
sarsaparilla 105  
sauerkraut 80, 81  
saw palmetto 105  
sawdust 14  
scale 24  
scented garden 260  
schisandra 152  
seaweed 8  
seaweed extract 10  
seeds 17–8, 30, 31, 33, 34, 47, 49, 52, 57, 60, 68, 78, 81, 85, 87, 90, 96, 106, 114, 117, 119, 120, 122, 126, 137, 141, 142, 143, 145, 146, 147, 153, 163, 169, 172, 174, 180, 186, 194, 196, 197, 199, 200, 204, 208, 209, 227, 232, 236, 241, 243, 249, 253

selenium 240  
shiitake mushroom **228–32**  
shingles 89, 90, 171, 174, 176, 190, 234, 235  
shogaols 130  
silica 184  
*Silybum marianum* (St Mary's thistle) 237  
silymarin 238, 240  
sinusitis 58, 95, 113, 116, 125, 181  
skin 55, 56, 62, 77, 78, 84, 89, 90, 91, 92, 96, 101, 102, 112, 113, 114, 136, 137, 139, 140, 146, 147, 165, 174, 181, 183, 189, 190, 218, 219, 220, 222, 250, 264  
skin garden 259  
sleep 72, 99, 205, 234, 252  
    *see also* insomnia  
slugs 25  
snails 25  
sodium 10  
soil 19–20  
solanine 212  
*Solanum lycopersicum* (tomato)  
246  
*Solanum tuberosum* (potato) 210  
sores 84, 171, 242  
    *see also* cold  
sores soy 226  
spinach **230–2**, 265  
*Spinacia oleracea* (spinach) 230  
Spirea 179  
spirulina 232

St John's wort 170, 216, **233–6**

St Mary's thistle 106, 108, 135, 145, 180, 221, **236–41**, 249

staphylococcus 145, 173

*Stellaria media* (chickweed) 91

stinging nettle 183

*see also* nettle

stomach 51, 99, 108, 125, 129, 178, 203, 211

stress 57, 58, 59, 86, 104, 105, 129, 139, 130, 151, 152, 160, 161, 162, 165, 175, 176, 205, 218, 219, 252, 253

stress garden 260

stroke 72, 73, 133, 222

sugar 23

sugarcane straw 14

sulforaphane 75

sulphur 10

sunchode 156

*see also* Jerusalem artichoke

sunburn 51, 52, 89, 90

suppository 58

sweet verbena tree 173

*see also* lemon myrtle

*Symphytum* 102

*Symphytum officinale* (comfrey) 100, 101

## T

*Tanacetum parthenium* (feverfew)

120

*Taraxacum officinale* (dandelion)

106

tea 32–3, 33–4, 37, 49, 60, 71, 73, 78, 83, 84, 87, 89, 90, 91, 92, 99, 105, 109, 112, 113, 116, 119, 121, 122, 125, 129, 131, 134, 137, 138, 142, 143, 149, 152, 163, 165, 165, 171, 172, 173, 174, 176, 177, 179, 182, 183, 185, 190, 200, 203, 206, 215, 219, 220, 224, 227, 229, 235, 238, 243, 245, 253, 255, 256

tea tree 39, 56, **241–3**, 245

tendons 139

tension 203

terpene 242

terpenes 39

testosterone 105

thiosulfinates 193

thrips 25

thrush 124, 242

*see also* candida

thyme 21, 81, 111, 148, 216, **243–6**

thyme throat gargle 245

thymol 243, 244

*Thymus vulgaris* (thyme) 244, 245

thyroid 80

tincture 29, 33, 34–6, 37, 41, 42, 60, 73, 78, 83, 84, 87, 90, 92, 96, 99, 105, 109, 110, 111, 113, 116, 119, 121, 122, 125, 129, 131, 134, 137, 140, 142, 143, 146, 147, 149, 152, 163, 165, 172, 174, 177, 179, 182, 185, 190, 203, 206, 215, 220, 224, 227, 235, 238, 245, 250, 253, 256

tinea 39, 52, 125

tinnitus 133

tisane *see* tea tissue repair 139

toenails 242

tomato 22, 61, **246–9**

tonsillitis 83, 84, 113, 208, 226, 227, 245

tribulus 103, 105

triglycerides 125

*Tropaeolum majus* (nasturtium) 180

tulsi (see also holy basil) 150

turmeric 106, 221, 237, **249–51**

*Turnera aphrodisiac* (damiana) 103

turnips 22, 75

## U

ulcers 51, 92, 102, 113, 139, 155, 176, 211, 263

    bowel 89, 90

    duodenal 84, 176

    gastrointestinal 92, 176, 211

    leg 84, 133

    mouth 51, 83, 84, 113, 176, 208, 211, 227, 242

    skin 52

    stomach 51, 75, 80, 81, 83, 84, 89, 90, 96, 178, 179, 211, 244, 245

    varicose 142, 155

urethritis 104, 105, 113

urinary system 199

uterus 129, 214

*Urtica dioica* (nettle) 183

## V

*Vaccinium augustifolium* (blueberry) 69

*Vaccinium corymbosum* (blueberry) 69

*Vaccinium myrtillus* (bilberry) 69

vagus nerve 108

valerian 85, 161, 164, 202, 233, 251–4  
*Valeriana officinalis* (valerian) 252  
varicose veins 95, 139, 142, 143, 181, 224  
venous insufficiency 142, 143  
vertigo 205  
vitamin A 199, 240  
vitamin B 80, 107  
vitamin B1 124  
vitamin B12 108  
vitamin C 80, 92, 124, 149, 168, 181, 195, 199, 214, 218, 240, 247  
vitamin E 61, 240  
vomiting 99, 121, 129, 130  
*Vitis vinifera* (grapes) 141

## W

walnuts 116  
warts 107, 109, 110  
washes 33, 34, 83, 84, 113, 115, 116, 185, 208, 227, 245  
weeds 25  
whooping cough 245  
withania 58, 59, 103, 150, 152, 175  
wood ash 82  
woodchips 14  
worm castings 10  
worm farms 20–1  
wormwood 109  
woundwort 254 *see also* yarrow  
wrinkles 219

## Y

yarrow 8, 254–6

yellow dock 77

## **Z**

zinc 10, 240

*Zingiber officinale* (ginger) 127, 128

zizyphus 85, 161

## About the Author

MIM BEIM graduated from Nature Care College with the nutrition prize in 1988 and is the author of seven books, including *Feelgood Food*, *Beaming with Health* and *The Commonsense Guide to Eating Well for the Nutritionally Bewildered*. She is the past Head of Naturopathy for the Australian Traditional Medicine Society (ATMS), Australia's leading society for Natural Medicine. She is also a member of the National Herbalists Association of Australia (NHAA). She manufactures a range of therapeutic herbal teas called Beaming with Health Herbal Tisanes and is a lecturer at the Australasian College of Natural Therapies.

# Copyright



The ABC 'Wave' device is a trademark of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and is used under licence by HarperCollinsPublishers Australia.

First published in Australia in 2011  
This edition published in 2011  
by HarperCollinsPublishers Australia Pty Limited  
ABN 36 009 913 517  
harpercollins.com.au

Copyright © Mim Beim 2011

The right of Mim Beim to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by her under the *Copyright Amendment (Moral Rights) Act 2000*.

This work is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part may be reproduced, copied, scanned, stored in a retrieval system, recorded, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

## **HarperCollinsPublishers**

25 Ryde Road, Pymble, Sydney, NSW 2073, Australia

31 View Road, Glenfield, Auckland 0627, New Zealand

A 53, Sector 57, Noida, UP, India

77–85 Fulham Palace Road, London, W6 8JB, United Kingdom

2 Bloor Street East, 20th floor, Toronto, Ontario M4W 1A8, Canada

10 East 53rd Street, New York NY 10022, USA

**National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication data:**

Beim, Mim, 1960–

Grow Your Own Medicine / Mim Beim.

ISBN: 978-0-7333-2804-6 (pbk.)

ISBN: 978-0-7304-9494-2 (ePub)

Includes index

Gardening — Therapeutic use.

Medicinal plants

Alternative medicine.

Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

615.53

Cover design: Design by Committee

Cover images by bigstockphoto.com

Internal design by Alicia Freile, Tango Media