

Living Herbs

Description

Lemon Balm
Melissa Officinalis
Family: Lamiaceae

Lemon Balm is a perennial that grows up to 60cm tall with square stems and green heart-shaped serrated leaves. The surface of the leaves is shiny, bright green with a dense and irregular network of veins throughout and emanates a strong lemon scent. Flowers are bunched in three to four places along the top of the stem and appear as small, yellow lip flowers arising from a coarse 8mm long calyx. Lemon Balm spreads along the ground through rhizomes.

Growing Tips

It likes a position in the sun but with a bit of shade midday and planted in rich moist soil. It spreads easily via the rhizomes but the root is not too deep. For best results trim back old growth to encourage fresh leaf growth.

Parts Used

Leaves and stalks.

Uses

For culinary use, Lemon Balm is best used fresh and can be added to salads, wines, vinegars, teas, beers or to mushrooms and fish dishes. In France it is added to liqueurs and in Switzerland it is used to flavour specialty cheeses.

Medicinally, it is a great calmer of the nervous system to stave off insomnia, headaches, dizziness, anxiety and restlessness and to improve memory. It stimulates digestion, eases flatulence and palpitations and dispels fevers. Its antiviral effect is used internally and a topical application is made for cold sores. It is safe to use in pregnancy, for morning sickness and headaches.

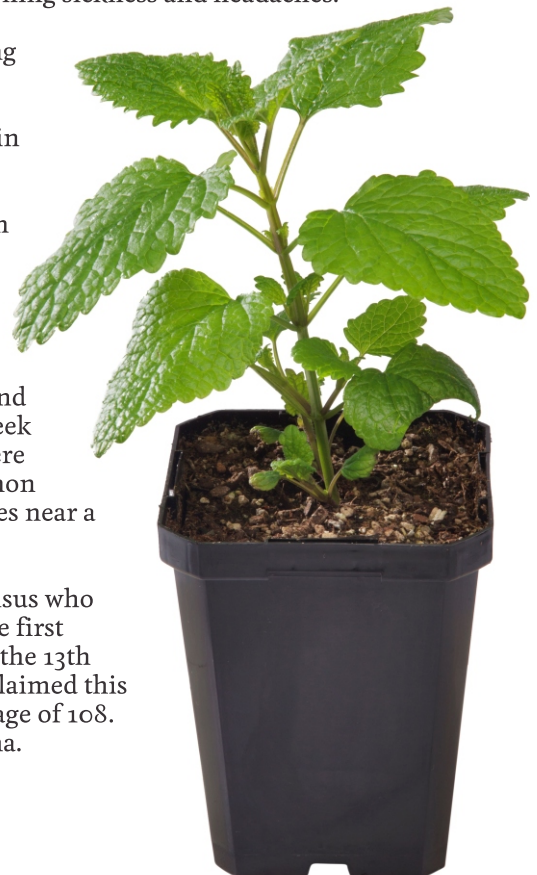
The best way to use it is as an infusion using the fresh or dried leaves, although drying weakens its taste and some of its medicinal effect. If crushed, the fresh leaves on the skin can repel mosquitoes.

Caution: avoid when on thyroid medication as it interferes with this medication's absorption.

Origin & History

It is a native of the Mediterranean region and central Europe and the name Melissa is Greek for bee. In a time when sugar and honey were hard to come by, great faith was put on Lemon Balm for attracting swarms and keeping bees near a hive.

It was also called the elixir of life by Paracelsus who used it to revitalize emaciated chickens. The first Prince of Wales, Llewellyn, who reigned in the 13th century, drank Lemon Balm tea daily and claimed this habit to be the reason for his living till the age of 108. The herb was dedicated to the goddess Diana.



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