

Living Herbs

Description

Thyme Common
Thymus Vulgaris
Family: Lamiaceae

Growing Tips

Thyme Common is a small woody shrub with greenish-grey oval leaves evenly arranged along thin branched twigs and grows a tiny white-purple beak-like flower. The plant itself grows up to 30cm tall. It is a perennial and makes nice fragrant borders. Its small purple and white flowers are a great attraction to bees and benevolent insects.

Parts Used

Thyme likes plenty of sun and neutral to alkaline soil with good drainage.

Uses

The shrub can be cut back to below the flower level after the bloom dies down. For best results it must be planted 30cm apart.

Leaves.

Thyme is used in every day cooking especially with meat, tomato and pizza, and its bitter quality alleviates bloating and flatulence. When using fresh, one or more whole twigs can be placed in a casserole and the stems removed before serving. The dried leaves can be stored for up to a year and only a third of the quantity is needed compared to the fresh leaves. Thyme holds its flavour very well while cooking.

The main ingredient that gives Thyme its distinctive smell and its medicinal value is thymol. This is present in any variety of Thyme but is most prominent in Thyme Common and Thyme Lemon so it is these two herbs that are most commonly used for culinary and medicinal purposes. Thyme is an important ingredient in many cough elixirs and lollies as it acts as an expectorant and a gargle with Thyme tea can alleviate sore throats, bleeding gums and bad breath.

Origin & History

Thyme originates in Western Mediterranean areas and was brought to Europe by the Romans who also added it to cheeses and liquors. It now grows wild in parts of South Canterbury.

The name Thyme has links to the Greek language where it meant "courage" or "to fumigate". In ancient Egypt it was used for embalming and Roman soldiers inhaled its smoke or its steam when placed in baths to give them courage.

Placed in a pillow, Thyme was said to induce sleep and ward off nightmares. The oil was used in World War I to ease pain and as an antiseptic.

It was also believed that twigs of Thyme placed on coffins would assure safe passage into the spiritual world.



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