

# Lemon Balm/Melissa

## Melissa officinalis



### Lemon Balm/Melissa Benefits

*Lemon Balm was dedicated to the goddess Diana, and used medicinally by the Greeks some 2,000 years ago. In the Middle Ages lemon balm was used to soothe tension, to dress wounds, and as a cure for toothache, skin eruptions, mad dog bites, crooked necks, and sickness during pregnancy. It was even said to prevent baldness. As a medicinal plant, lemon balm has traditionally been employed against bronchial inflammation, earache, fever, flatulence, headaches, high blood pressure, influenza, mood disorders, palpitations, toothache and vomiting. A tea made from Lemon balm leaves is said to soothe menstrual cramps and helps relieve PMS.*

The herb is used for nervous agitation, sleeping problems, functional gastrointestinal complaints, menstrual cramps and urinary spasms.

It is thought that the volatile oils in lemon balm contain chemicals that relax muscles, particularly in the bladder, stomach, and uterus, thereby relieving cramps, gas, and nausea.

ESCOP (European Scientific Cooperative On Phytotherapy) lists its internal use for tenseness, restlessness, irritability, and symptomatic treatment of digestive disorders, such as minor spasms; externally, for herpes labialis.

Recent evidence suggests that lemon balm has a depressant or sedative action on the central nervous systems of laboratory mice. The German Standard License for lemon balm tea approves it for nervous disorders of sleep and of the gastrointestinal tract, and to stimulate the appetite (Wichtl and Bisset, 1994).

### **Grave's Disease**

Lemon balm may block some of the activity of thyroid hormone in the body. Therefore, it has been used in the past to treat Grave's disease, an auto-immune condition in which the thyroid gland produces excess thyroid hormone. Although laboratory and animal studies show that lemon balm may help decrease thyroid in the body, no human studies have yet been conducted for this possible use.

### **Mental Clarity, Concentration and Relaxation**

Lemon balm is widely used to treat anxiety and insomnia in Europe. It reduces anxiety and stress and eases sleep disorders. Recently it produced an unexpected result in a research study: it greatly increased the ability to concentrate and perform word and picture tasks.

### **Helpful for Homework?**

In a study of lemon balm at Northumbria University in England students were tested for weeks while using either Lemon balm or a placebo. The students did significantly better on the tests after taking Lemon balm and continued to post improved scores for up to six hours after taking the herb. The students taking Lemon balm were noted to be calmer and less stressed during the tests. (From Prevention Magazine Sept. 2004)

### **Herpes and Antiviral Properties**

Research has shown that the plant contains polyphenols, it can help significantly in the treatment of cold sores and combat the herpes simplex virus, shingles as well as other viral afflictions. Studies have shown a significant reduction in the duration and severity of herpes. Researchers also noted a "tremendous reduction" in the frequency of recurrence.

When applied to cold sores or genital sores caused by the herpes simplex virus, creams or ointments containing lemon balm have speeded healing. The infections did not spread as much and individuals using topical lemon balm also reported more relief from symptoms such as itching and redness. At least part of this effect is due to antiviral properties of caffeic acid and rosmarinic acid, which are contained in lemon balm.

In one study on 115 patients, a proprietary preparation of lemon balm extract in a lip balm showed efficacy in treating lip sores associated with the herpes simplex virus (WÃ¶bling and Leonhardt, 1994).

### **Insomnia/Anxiety**

Several studies have used Lemon balm, and Lemon balm/Valerian combinations to treat stress, anxiety and insomnia. The studies have shown improved sleep patterns and reduced stress and anxiety. In one study a Lemon balm/Valerian combination was found to be as effective as the prescription drug Halcion.

Lemon balm is approved for "nervous sleeping disorders" and "functional gastrointestinal complaints" by Commission E of the German Federal Institute for Drugs and Medical Devices. Commission E is the German governmental agency that evaluates the safety and effectiveness of herbal products. The United States does not have a comparable agency to evaluate herbal products.

### **Thyroid and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome**

Lemon balm is used in Europe for treating thyroid problems and has shown an ability to regulate thyroid hormone production. This ability, along with the herbs anti-viral characteristics have made the herb useful in the treatment of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.

### **Alzheimer's and Dementia**

Lemon balm contains volatile (essential) oils ,including citronellal and citral A and B, which are known to have sedative properties. In both animal and human studies, lemon balm taken by mouth has had calming effects. In larger doses, it may promote sleep. In one study, researchers found that using lemon balm also improved memory and lengthened attention span in individuals suffering from Alzheimer's disease. This effect may be due to its content of antioxidants, which are thought to protect body cells from damage caused by a chemical process called oxidation.

Another small but interesting study used lemon balm, aromatherapeutically to calm overexcited individuals suffering from dementia. Dementia is an increasing deficiency in thought processes caused by brain damage such as from a stroke or disease such as Alzheimer's disease.

#### **Lemon Balm/Melissa Herb Notes / Side Effects**

Very little information is available on how lemon balm might affect a developing foetus, an infant, or a small child. Therefore, its use is not recommended during pregnancy, while breast-feeding, or during early childhood.

When lemon balm is used with both prescription and non-prescription drugs that promote sleepiness, the effects of the drug may be exaggerated, resulting in sedation or mental impairment. Lemon balm may cause excessive sedation if it is taken with other potentially sedating herbs such as: Catnip, Hops, Kava, St. John's Wort and Valerian

Due to its potential effects on thyroid hormone utilisation, lemon balm may interfere with therapy for hyperthyroidism (thyroid hormone excess) or hypothyroidism (thyroid hormone deficiency)

In animal studies, lemon balm increased pressure inside the eyes. Even though similar results have not been reported in humans, individuals who have glaucoma should not take lemon balm.

#### **Latin Names**

*Melissa officinalis*

#### **Common Names**

Balm Mint, Bee Balm, Blue Balm, Cure-all, Garden Balm, Honey Plant, Melissa, Sweet Balm, Sweet Mary

#### **Properties**

anti-bacterial, anti-oxidant, anti-spasmodic, anti-viral, aromatic, carminative, cerebral stimulant, diaphoretic, digestive, emmenagogue, febrifuge, nervous restorative, spasmolytic, sedative (mild), tonic.

**Indicated for**

Amenorrhoea, anxiety, calming nerves, chronic fatigue, colds, cold sores, colic, depression, dizziness, fevers, gastrointestinal complaints, Graves' disease, headaches, herpes virus, hypertension, hypothyroidism, insomnia, menstrual cramps, mental clarity and concentration, nausea relief, nervous agitation, neurocardiac syndrome, painful urination, palpitations, phobias, relaxation, shingles, sleeping problems, upset stomach, viral infections, wounds.

