

## Peppermint

*Mentha piperita*, commonly known as peppermint, is one of the oldest medicinal plants. While its origins are theoretically rooted in Eastern Asia, the plant has been cultivated all over the world. Peppermint propagates asexually by sending out roots, useful for the perpetuation of the species, but a nightmare for those trying to rid their garden of this herb.

Peppermint's medicinal action according to Rudolph Weiss, author of the classic Herbal Medicine, has three principal activities: it anaesthetizes the mucous membranes, reducing nausea and vomiting; it encourages the liver and gallbladder to produce and release bile; and it "disinfects" the stomach in cases of improper or imbalanced flora.

Peppermint is a cooling and relaxing herb. In fact, its anaesthetic properties come from the plant's ability to excite cold receptors in intestinal mucous membranes. Peppermint is medicinally useful for reducing such disorders of the gastrointestinal tract as spastic colon, irritable bowel syndrome, and spastic diarrhea. Peppermint taken after a rich meal will reduce gas and indigestion.

Tincture and tea are the most common methods of administration. Modernly, enteric coated (thus by-passing absorption in the stomach and allowing the medicine to reach the intestines) peppermint oil capsules have been found quite effective in the treatment of lower intestinal disorders, such as spastic colon. Peppermint tea is safe to use on a short-term basis in babies with colic, and it is often a tolerable form of treatment for nausea in children and reluctant teenagers.

Peppermint also has medicinal uses beyond digestive ailments. Its antispasmodic properties and pleasant taste make it a useful addition to cough formulas. The plant's relaxing properties make it helpful in cases of nervous insomnia and restlessness. Externally, peppermint is used to relieve muscle and arthritic pain, and as a local treatment for fungal infections of the skin.