



Name: _____

Dictionary of 18th Century Herb Usage

BASIL - Chiefly used as flavoring when cooking. Used dried as snuff to relieve headaches and colds. Also used as a strewing herb. Basil is in the mint family, native to Africa, Asia, India, and Iran. It was brought from Europe to America in the early 1600s and by 1774 was grown commercially in Virginia. Its clove-like flavor made many foods more appetizing. Colonists used this herb, also called St. Josephwort, in salads and soups, especially pea soup.

BEE BALM - Used for bee stings. Bee balm is a member of the mint family. It is native to North America, but colonists soon sent seeds to Europe for their friends to plant and enjoy. Tea brewed from its leaves was called Oswego tea and was used as a substitute for China tea after the 1773 Boston Tea Party.

BURNET - Burnet or Salad Burnet was carried to New England by the Pilgrims. Its cucumber-flavored leaves added zip to salads, casseroles, and soups. It was put in wine to which it "yeeldeth a certaine grace in drinking."

CARAWAY - Caraway can be found cultivated and wild in the United States, Europe, and Asia. Seeds were used in bread, cookies, and other recipes, and as a flavoring in cordials. The boiled roots of caraway were eaten by Native Americans and recommended for those with a cold or weak stomach. A tasty tea can be made by steeping seeds in boiling water then sweetening with honey.

CHAMOMILE - Infused as a tea for indigestion, gas, and stomach aches. Also used as a strewing herb and insect repellent.

COMFREY - Early leaves were used in salads. Used medicinally as a poultice to heal wounds and reduce swelling.

CORIANDER - Coriander is an annual in the parsley family. It has become naturalized in this country, but is a native of southern Europe and Asia Minor. Colonists employed this spice in breads, desserts, and pickles. The seeds were chewed as a breath freshener. Early distillers used oil of coriander in flavoring some whiskeys.

DILL - Used in salads and for cooking. Dill was used to flavor soups, salads, breads, stew, fish, potatoes, sauces, pickles, and gin.

ELECAMPANE - Used to treat skin diseases in sheep and horses; also as a diuretic and for coughs.

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FENNEL - Fennel leaves were used in salads, stews, and vegetables. The seeds were used in pies and with other baked fruits as well as in breads.

FEVERFEW - For "female hysteria," melancholia, and constipation.

GARLIC CHIVES - Culinary uses as a flavoring.

GERMANDER - For gout, rheumatism, fever, and melancholy.

HOREHOUND - Used to make a cough syrup. Often used with honey and other herbs. Mixed with plantain for snakebites. Soaked in fresh milk to repel flies. The leaves are used for flavoring beer, cough drops, honey, and for making tea. Leaves should be gathered just before the flowers open.

HYSSOP - Strewn on the floor to prevent the spread of infection; also used to treat respiratory illnesses.

LAVENDER - Strewing herb and insect repellent.

LEMON BALM - Infused as a tea for headaches, indigestion, nausea. Distilled as a treatment to clean and heal wounds.

LOVAGE - Similar to celery in taste, used in similar manner. Also used to treat kidney stones.

MARJORAM - Used in cooking. Also to cure insomnia, nasal congestion, and loss of appetite. Sweet Marjoram was used to flavor stews and soups.

PARSLEY - Culinary uses. Seeds used as a diuretic.

PENNYROYAL - Strewing herb. Flea and mosquito repellent.

PEPPERMINT - Breath freshener. Leaves infused as a tea. Peppermint was introduced early to the United States. It also went wild. However, since it prefers wetter land, it is not as prevalent as spearmint. Peppermint leaves were chewed to sweeten the breath. Peppermint oil was used to flavor tea, foods, and medicine.

PLAINTAIN - Used in salads; also as a poultice to heal wounds, and the seeds to prevent miscarriage. The leaves, seeds, and roots could be brewed as a tea. It was brought by European settlers and spread where they settled and earned the name "White Man's Foot."

QUEEN ANNE'S LACE - As a diuretic and for kidney stones; also the seeds were used for birth control.

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ROSE HIPS - These are the round red fruits formed from the flowers of the wild rose. It is the seedpod of the plant. Tea can be brewed from the hips, or they may also be dried. It is best to gather rose hips in late fall after the first frost when they are bright red.

ROSEMARY - Oil used as a rub for sore muscles. Promotes liver functions. Culinary uses.

RUE - Externally to cure warts, ringworm, and poisonous bites. Internally as a treatment for colic and epilepsy. Decocted for earaches.

SAGE - Culinary uses as a flavoring for pork, sausage, and poultry. Medically in combination with other herbs for headaches. Decocted and as a mouthwash for sore throats and infected gums.

SORREL - Used to flavor vinegars and as a pot vegetable. As a poultice for infected wounds. To remove stains from linen.

SPEARMINT - Spearmint was brought to the United States by some of the earliest immigrants. By 1672 it was growing wild. Spearmint leaves were used to make tea, jellies, and sauces. The leaves were sugared and mixed with sugared rose and violet petals to make candy.

ST. JOHN'S WORT - Leaves used treat burns and wounds. Flowers used as a tincture for melancholy.

STINGING NETTLES - Early spring leaves used in salads. A mixture of the seeds, bayberries, gunpowder, and honey was used for rheumatism. Leaves used to line cheese press, and dried as chicken feed.

TANSY - Seed as a vermifuge (to kill internal parasites like roundworms) for children; the root was also used to treat gout.

TARRAGON - Used in salads and to flavor foods.

THYME - Culinary use as a flavoring. Medicinally for toothaches, gout, headaches, and to cure nightmares. Used as an antiseptic. Thyme was brought from Europe by the earliest settlers. Sprigs of thyme were placed on lard and butter to keep them from becoming rancid. It was used to flavor soups, stews, meat, cheese and egg dishes, seafood, and vegetables.

YARROW - Leaves can be chewed for toothaches.

Sources:

"Family Medicine in Colonial Virginia," Department of School and Group Services, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation (Williamsburg Virginia).

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