

Savory

Satureja Species



January 2015 Herb of the Month

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Savory Herb of the Year 2015

Family: Labiatae; other members include mints.

Genus & Species: *Satureja hortensis* (Summer),
S. Montana (Winter)

Other Names: Bean Herb, White Thyme

Parts Used: Leaves

“Mercury claims dominion over this herb, neither is there a better remedy against the colic and iliac passion, than this herb; keep it dry by you all all the year, if you love yourself and your ease, and it is a hundred pounds to a penny if you do not.”

Nicolas Culpeper, 1653

This deliciously pungent herb is most widely known as a culinary herb and as a staple in many recipes and one of the herbs in the famous Herbs de Provence. It is also said to one of the oldest flavoring herbs, although it has long held a reputation as a medicinal herb as well. There are two main species Winter and Summer. The savories (*Satureja spp.*) belong to the Deadnettle Family (*Lamiaceae*), like many other aromatic herbs. There are 30 species in the *Satureja* genus, all native to temperate and warm temperate regions of the Northern Hemisphere.

Growing Savory

Savories make good plants for the front of a border. Both types enjoy a well-drained, alkaline soil in full sun. Summer Savory prefers a moist well-drained soil with frequent watering. Winter Savory is slower to germinate; it prefers a lighter drier soil, do not over water. Do not use too much manure or fertilizer, as this will weaken them.

Plant Winter Savory 18” apart; Summer Savory, 6-9” apart Both are easy to grow from seeds or cuttings, and both grow well in containers.

Keep savories’ woody growth pruned to force new, non woody growth, and pluck off flowers after they bloom. Leaves of both species may be harvested when plants reach 6 inches.

History & Folklore

Savory was known to the ancient Greeks and Romans, and later imported to Europe. The American colonists brought both winter and summer savories to North America; 17th century botanist, John Josselyn, mentions both.

The ancient Roman, Virgil recommended planting savory near beehives, as bees are extremely attracted to savory blossoms. Savory was planted around beehives also to flavor the honey in the hives.

The genus *Satureja* is named for the satyrs, ancient Greek mythical demigods of the forest, who were known for their lusty habits and half-man/half goat shape. Legends held that the satyrs wore crowns of Savory, and the herb was once held to be an aphrodisiac.

The Roman naturalist Pliny called Summer Savory an aphrodisiac and Winter Savory a sex depressant. Summer savory was also known to strengthen the mind when carried or worn.

The Romans introduced Summer Savory throughout Europe, where it quickly became a popular spice. Germanic tribes loved its flavor in beans; this is where its reputation as a “bean herb” came from. To this day, Germans regard Savory as an effective remedy to the downside of eating beans, flatulence. The Germanic Saxons who settled in Britain thought Savory made every food taste savory, which is how it got its English name.

Savories have been employed as digestive aids for flatulence and colic, general tonics for the prevention of diarrhea, as expectorants for the lungs and head, as antiseptic gargles, steeped in wine as tonics, particularly after fevers, and as disinfecting smudges. They are recommended in facial steam and baths for persons with oily skin.

Medicinal Uses

By the 17th century, Summer Savory had all but shed its association for being an aphrodisiac herb. The summer and winter varieties began to be used interchangeably and called simply “savory”. Savory is a carminative herb, which is recommended for gas and digestive upsets, including colic, diarrhea and indigestion.

Nicolas Culpeper wrote, “it expels wind from the stomach and bowels and is good for asthma and other affections of the breast. Neither is there a better remedy for the colic and iliac passion (upset stomach)” He also recommended Savory as a stimulant to “quicken the dull spirits.” Externally, Culpeper touted Savory poultices for sciatica and “palsied members” (paralyzed limbs). He also recommended using the juice of the leaves as 1. eyedrops for dimness of sight “if it proceed from thin humours distilled from the brain;” 2. Headed with oil of roses and dropped into the ears or mixed with wheat flour and applied externally to relieve deafness and ringing in the ears; and 3. Sniffed up the nose to loosen though phlegm from the chest and lungs and to enliven dull, lethargic spirits. He considered summer savory better than winter savory for use in making preserves and herbal syrups.

Colonists introduced Savory into North America, where it was widely used as a digestive aid and cough, cold and diarrhea remedy, especially for children. The 19th century Eclectics also distilled the herb’s oil and used it like clove oil to treat toothache. Professor Jacques Pellecuer at the University of Montpellier would later study this in the 1970’s & 1980’s, where the studies found that the essential oil of Winter Savory possesses bactericidal and anti parasitic properties.

Contemporary herbalists generally confine their recommendations to indigestions and diarrhea, but some still suggest summer savory as a sexual stimulant, especially for women, even though there has been no scientific research to back this up. Its antiseptic and astringent properties make it a good treatment for sore throats. A poultice of the leaves also gives quick relief to insect bites.

Herbs de Provence by Stark Natural Herbs

2 parts Dried Thyme
1 part Basil
1 part Marjoram
1 part Tarragon
1 part Rosemary
2 parts Summer Savory
½ part Sage
1 part Fennel Seeds, cracked
1 part Lavender flowers

References

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Written by Celle Rikwerda CH HC HA