

Lemon Balm, Balm, Melissa

Family	Lamiaceae
Botanical	Melissa officinalis
Parts Used	Dried or fresh aerial parts
USDA Hardiness	4A - 9B
Light	Full Sun
Soil	Well Drained
Duration	Perennial



Propagation	Divide roots or start from seed indoors in late winter or early spring. Transplant into garden after danger of frost. Soil pH requirements: 5.6 to 9.0.
Water	As needed, do not overwater
Growing	Grows and spreads prolifically. It will pop up in random places around the garden. Lemon balm grown outdoors prefers full sun, but is mildly shade-tolerant. In dry climates, it grows best in partial shade. Requires consistently moist soil, do not let soil dry out in between waterings. Water on a regular schedule, taking care to not overwater. Lemon balm can be susceptible to whitefly, spider mites, thrips and powdery mildew. Lemon balm grows in clumps and spreads vegetatively as well as by seed. In mild temperate zones, the stems of the plant die off at the start of the winter, but shoot up again in spring. It can be easily grown from stem cuttings, or from seeds. Under ideal conditions, it will seed itself prolifically and can become a nuisance in gardens.

Medicinal Uses	Diaphoretic, calmative, stomachic, carminative, antispasmodic, emmenagogue, nervine, sedative, antiviral and antidepressant.
Benefits	Eases digestive problems, nervousness, insomnia, depression, migraines, stress, hypertension, herpes simplex and zoster, restlessness, palpitations and fevers.
Preparation	Infusion of the leaves and salve. Best used fresh. Infusion: Pour a cup of boiling water on 2-3 teaspoons of the dried herb or 4-6 fresh leaves and infuse for 10-15 minutes well covered until drunk. A cup of this tea should be taken in the morning and evening.

Fines Herbes

Culinary Uses You can use the herb to bake a batch of lemon balm cookies or lemon balm bread, whisk up a quick lemon balm vinaigrette, or top your pasta with lemon balm pesto.

LEMON BALM LEMONADE - This lemon balm recipe makes about 6 cups and has only about 36 calories per cup! Of course, you can add more honey if you like it a little sweeter but that will up the calories. You'll need:

- 3 cups loosely packed, fresh lemon balm leaves (or about 1 cup dried)
- 6 cups hot water
- Juice of 4 fresh lemons (around 1 cup)
- 3 Tablespoons honey (I wonder how pure maple syrup would taste in this?)

Put the leaves in the bottom of a 2 quart pitcher. Lightly crush the leaves with a wooden spoon. Pour the hot water over the leaves and let it steep around 1 hour. After an hour, strain the leaves then add the lemon juice and honey.

Stir it well before serving. Add a small sprig of lemon balm as a garnish. This refreshing tea is wonderful either hot or cold!



Historical Facts The mystique that surrounds lemon balm is rich and spans thousands of years beginning in ancient Ephesus, known today as Turkey. "In the Ephesian ceremonial, the life of the bee was the model: the Great Goddess was the queen bee, the mother of her people, and her image was in outline not unlike the bee, with a grotesque mixture of the human form: her priestesses were called Melissai..." within ancient Greece religious doctrine, the Melissai priestesses served the Great Mother (Rhea or Cybele) or the Goddess of Earth and Nature such as Demeter, Persephone, and especially Artemis. The honeybee was considered to be a form the human soul took when descending from the Goddess Artemis herself. "It was only those souls who had lived a righteous life who were called Melissae, and afterwards they returned to heaven, just as the bee returned to her hive." Bees were not only important in the cosmology of ancient man but also in their commerce (honey, wax). Thus anything that helped to attract the valued honeybees to a hive, or keep the honeybees from swarming, gained in stature and usage to man as well. This is where lemon balm enters recorded history. Lemon balm was a sacred herb in the Temple of Artemis/Diana, and the herb that assisted the ancient beekeepers in keeping honeybees happy and well fed with nectar.

According to Pliny the Elder, bees were "delighted with this herb above others". Both of lemon balm's given Greek names mean bee/honey bee. In ancient Greece sprigs of lemon balm were placed into beehives to attract wandering honeybee swarms. Lemon balm was also planted around the bee's hives to keep them happy and more apt to stay at the hive and not swarm away.

In the ninth century, the first Holy Roman Emperor Charlemagne thought Melissa so beautiful and so valuable to the health of his subjects that he ordered it planted in all monastery gardens. Lemon balm was used for dressing wounds and as a general panacea or tonic, but the monks are more well known for using lemon balm to create perfumes and liquors which were very popular among the people of Medieval and early Renaissance periods.

In Shakespeare's day lemon balm was used as a secret messenger or code, in the language of flowers, between lovers to signify sympathy.

Additional Tips Very good for children, mild and pleasant tasting. Generally calms and soothes.

Nutrition Facts Lemon balm contains volatile oils, including citral, citronella, eugenol, and other components as well as flavonoids, triterpenoids, rosmarinic acid, polyphenols, and tannin. Several new flavonoids were discovered in lemon balm in 2002. Flavonoids are a group of water-soluble plant pigments that have antiviral and antioxidative qualities.