

herbs @risc

A wide range of herbs grow on the RISC forest garden. They are not only used in the Global Cafe downstairs, but are also the ingredients for medicinal infusions, ointments and other preparations. Here are a few of our favourites.

Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*)

A relaxing tonic for anxiety, mild depression, restlessness and irritability. It reduces feelings of nervousness and panic and can even quieten the palpitations that may accompany these. Often used with St John's Wort for Seasonal Adjustment Disorder (SAD). Lemon balm is useful when over-anxiety is causing digestive problems such as indigestion, acidity, nausea, bloating and colicky pains. It is also useful for cold sores, chickenpox and shingles. It is best used fresh, a couple of sprigs to a cup of boiling water or as a tincture of fresh plant. Can also be used to flavour cooking.

Sage (*Salvia officinalis*)

A first rate remedy as a gargle for sore throats due to it's combination of antiseptic, relaxing and astringent actions. For the same reasons it makes an excellent mouthwash for mouth ulcers and sore gums. Sage is a digestive tonic and stimulant and is also used as a nerve tonic, helping both to calm and stimulate the nervous system. This combination of actions make it an ideal tonic for older people. As a cold tea it helps to reduce menopausal night sweats and new mothers should know that it will dry up breast milk. Fresh leaves can be rubbed onto bites and stings as a first aid remedy.

Caution: not to be used in medicinal doses if pregnant or epileptic.

Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*)

A very useful remedy as a tea or syrup for chest infections, even proving helpful in more serious problems such as bronchitis, whooping cough and pleurisy. The volatile oils in thyme are both antiseptic and expectorant helping to clear infection and make mucous secretions thinner and therefore easier to cough up. The oils also help relieve muscle spasms; very useful for the tightness that often accompanies chest infections. Thyme is also an anti-fungal in conditions like ringworm and athlete's foot. Research suggests that thyme and its volatile oil have a significant tonic effect, supporting the normal functioning of the body and countering the effects of ageing.

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St John's Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*)

Well known as a safe and effective antidepressant, St John's Wort has a long history of use as a herb for nervous problems, especially any combination of anxiety, tension, insomnia and depression – particularly when associated with the menopause. It is also a valuable tonic for the liver and gall bladder. Externally the beautiful deep red infused oil is an excellent antiseptic and is used for wounds and burns. It also helps relieve cramps and nerve pain such as sciatica when massaged over the affected area. Flowering tops are gathered just as the flowers are opening.

Caution: St John's Wort may affect the metabolism of other medications. If you take other medicines please consult your GP or a Medical Herbalist before taking this herb.

Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*)

The most important use of fennel seeds is to relieve wind and bloating. A tea made from ¼ to 1/2 tsp of seeds per cup of water can be taken up to 5 times a day: crushing the seeds slightly before making the tea will help to release the aromatic oils, making the tea more effective. Fennel increases breast milk production and is safe for treating colic and painful teething in babies and so makes an excellent choice of tea for breastfeeding women, as the medicinal properties of fennel will pass through the breast milk to the child.

Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea angustifolia*)

Used traditionally for a wide range of acute and chronic infections, from boils and abscesses to septicaemia. It can be used for impetigo, childhood diseases like chickenpox, mastitis and epidemic influenza among many others. Echinacea is an excellent remedy for tonsillitis, both internally and as a gargle. A fresh root tincture is regarded as the most effective preparation and as Echinacea is very non-toxic it can be taken frequently in quite large doses to good effect. The best preparations should leave a tingling sensation on the tongue. It can be useful for people who have chronic diseases of the lung or diabetes to take a course of Echinacea in low doses over the winter to help prevent infections.

Caution: If a condition is potentially serious it should be treated by or in conjunction with a qualified medical herbalist or your GP.

Marigold (*Calendula arvensis*)

Calendula, well known as one of the ornamental marigolds, blooms month after month from early spring to first frost. Because *calend* means 'month' in Latin, the plant's lengthy flowering season is believed to have given Calendula its name. The herb has been used to heal wounds and treats inflamed skin since ancient times.

Comfrey (*Symphytum uplandicum*)

This plant is so useful – every garden should have one. It is edible, attracts bees, is used as chickenfeed, made into a liquid plant feed, fed to horses to condition their coats... In herbal medicine it is made into ointments and poultices to draw out infections and heal bruised and broken skin.