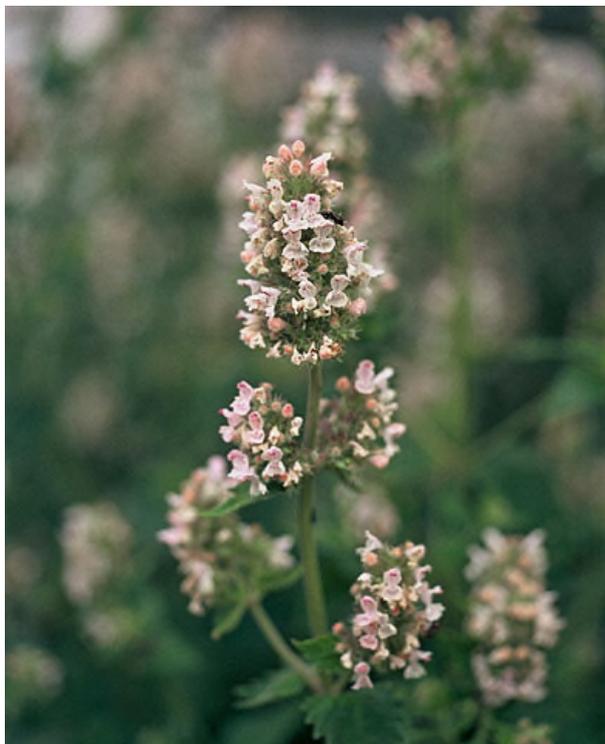


CATNIP



Nepeta cataria

[NEP-eh-tuh kat-AR-ee-uh]

Family: Labiatae

Names: catmint, cat's wort, catnep, catrup, catwort, English catnip, field balm, nep, nip; nepeta cataire, c(h)ataire (commune), herbe a chat(s), herbe au(x) chats, herbe-des-chats, mente a chat(s), menthe au(x) chat(s), menthe de(s) chat(s), nepeta, nepeta chataire, nepete, nepete c(h)ataire) (French); Nept (German); Cataria (Italian); Calaminta (Spanish); Nebada (Mexican)

Description: An erect perennial which produces small whitish or pinkish (occasionally blue or lilac), purple- or red-dotted flowers. The plant is strongly scented with a mintlike odor, rather like pennyroyal. It is native from

the eastern Mediterranean region to the western Himalayas, central Asia, southern Siberia and China. It has been introduced in Japan, North America, South Africa and Java. Catnip is grown for extraction of its oil. The lemon oil from catnip is used in perfumes, candies and pharmaceuticals. Nepetalactone is employed to prepare feline attractants, sometimes used on toys for cats. This is similar to the hormone released by felines in heat. It's cultivated as a medicinal plant, bee pasturage and for use as a condiment.

Cultivation: Catnip is a hardy plant that will grow well almost everywhere from the poorest dry garden soil to rich, deep-shaded woods. It enjoys full sun, but will tolerate partial shade. Soil pH can range between 5 and .5. The plants will become more fragrant when grown in a sandy soil in full sun than in a heavy loam under shade. Frequent shallow cultivation encourages vigorous growth. A field of catnip usually produces for about three years. The flowering tops are the most desirable part of the plant. By weight it's 60-80% stem material. Commercial plantings can be expected to produce between 1500-2000 lbs per acre. Commercial fields in NC, with plants spaced at 9-12 inches in rows 30-38 inches from center have yielded between 3000 and 5000 pounds of dried herb per acre. The plant is easily propagated by seeds, which remain viable for 4 or 5 years and may germinate erratically. They should be sown at a depth of an inch or less, with seedling emergence usually in 8-12 days. Once in place it self-sows. Transplants can also be used as well as root division and stem tip or softwood cuttings. The plants need little attention, except weeding. Pinching the plant at the appearance of the first flower buds produces a bushy plant with superior leaf production. Gather just as it is beginning to

bloom, generally in mid-summer. Collect the lower leaves for minimum impact or clip stems. If you choose to gather the stems and upper plant, cut the stem six inches or more above the ground to protect the roots. Dry the herb as soon as possible in a warm, dry, well-ventilated area on a non-metallic screen or cheesecloth. Keep away from sunlight and toss the herb frequently while drying to expedite the process and avoid mold.

History: The generic name *Nepeta* is said to have been derived from the town Nepete in Italy where catnip was once cultivated. Catnip was cultivated for cats by the classical Greeks and Romans. Since the Old Kingdom in Egypt (2700-2300BC), catnip has been a symbol of fertility; it was dedicated to the goddesses Bast and Sekhmet, the cat and the lioness. Catnip was believed to help women transform themselves into cats at night. By 1265 it was a familiar herb of kitchen gardens in England. During the early medieval period the leaves and young shoots are known to have been used as a seasoning in the kitchen. In 15th century England, catnip leaves were used for rubbing meats before cooking, and also sprinkled in mixed green salads. Before modern Chinese tea became widely available, catnip tea was frequently consumed in England. In the belief that catnip roots made even the kindest person mean, early American hangmen consumed catnip roots before executions to harden themselves for their work. Catnip growing near houses has long had a reputation for repelling rats, no doubt because it attracts cats.

Constituents: carvacrol, beta-caryophyllene, nepetol, thymol, geraniol, citronella, nerol, valeric acid and nepetalactone (responsible for the catnip effect). Good content of vitamins A and C.

Properties: carminative, stimulant, tonic, diaphoretic, emmenagogue, antispasmodic

Energetics: spicy, bitter, cool

Meridians/Organs affected: lungs, liver

Medicinal Uses: Catnip has long been used medicinally as a tea, juice, tincture, infusion and poultice. Catnip tea is used for headaches, stomachaches, colic and sleeplessness in children. It has also been used to treat cancer, insanity, nervousness, nightmare, scurvy and tuberculosis, while a root extract served as a mild stimulant. Drinking two cups of catnip tea a day could significantly reduce the likelihood of developing cataracts. Catnip has been employed orally to treat colic, diarrhea, flatulence, hiccups, whooping cough, the common cold, measles and chicken pox (reduces the eruptions), asthma, yellow fever, scarlet fever, smallpox, jaundice and to induce parturition and encourage menstruation. Poultices were used for hives, sore breasts of nursing mothers and to reduce swelling. A poultice of catnip and other herbs was employed to treat aching teeth in the Ozark Mountains. A tincture makes a good friction rub for rheumatic and arthritic joints and, as an ointment, to treat hemorrhoids. Catnip was sometimes smoked to relieve respiratory ailments. The fresh leaves can also be chewed for headache and as a remedy for toothache. It is an old home remedy for colds, nervous tension, fevers and nightmare. It is diaphoretic and antispasmodic. Fresh catnip leaves are preferred for infusion or tincture.

The Chinese consider it bitter, cold and spicy. They use it to harmonize the liver, nerves and lungs, and in the case of nervous tension due to too much emotional upheaval. For overexcited children, they recommend a mixture, in equal parts, of catnip, chamomile and lemon balm tea.

Dosage: The tincture dose is 30-40 drops 3 times a day. The infusion is taken cold as a tonic or hot as a fever remedy, 1-2 cups daily.

Combinations: Use with boneset, elder, yarrow or cayenne in colds

REMEDIES:

Diarrhea Tea: 3 cups water, 1 tsp catnip leaves, ½ tsp each raspberry or blackberry leaves, slippery elm bark and peppermint leaves, ½ tsp

cinnamon bark powder. Combine ingredients and water in a saucepan. Bring mixture to a simmer, then remove it from heat. Steep for 15 minutes, then strain out herbs. For a 50 pound child, give 1 cup every half-hour until the symptoms go away.

Calming Tea: ½ tsp each catnip leaves, chamomile flowers, passionflower leaves and lemon balm leaves; ¼ tsp peppermint leaves, 2 cups water. Place herbs and water in a saucepan and bring to a simmer. Remove from heat, steep for 15 minutes and strain out herbs. Give this tea freely, as needed.

Ray's Warming Winter Brew

2 parts fresh lemon balm, catnip, sage, thyme and grated fresh gingerroot, 1 part fresh or dried rose hips, ½ part licorice root. Measure out ½ -1 cup of dried herbs per quart of boiling water. If using fresh herbs, double the amount of plant material. Combine the herbs in a pt. Pour 1 quart of boiling water over the herbs. Stir well, cover, and steep for 15-20 minutes.

Toxicity: No evidence of harmful effects from catnip consumption.

Ritual Use: Gender: cold, Planet: Venus; Element: Water; Associated Deity: Bast and Sekmet; Basic powers: love, animal contacts; Specific Uses: use in love sachets and incenses, especially with rose petals. Dry large leaves as bookmarks in magical books. Give to your cat to sniff and play with and to create a psychic bond between you and your cat. It has some history as a charm to cure barrenness and may yet be used to bring fertility either to one's magick or to one's womb. Catnip is also corresponded with all four Nine cards in tarot's minor arcane. A mixture of catnip with dragon's blood is used as an incense to be used to rid one's self of a behavioral problem or other bad habits. To eliminate a serious defect or stop an alienating addiction, burn dried catnip and bloodroot. Write on a piece of paper the condition you want to get rid of and throw the paper into the fire. At the same time, invoke the name of a protective spirit.

Seeking New Love: Soak catnip in good whiskey overnight, ideally in the light of the Full Moon. Strain it out and sprinkle the liquid on your doorstep for 21 days in the shape of a new crescent moon.

Spell for Warriors: Chew on the fresh herb for courage, daring, fierceness and protection

Cosmetic Uses: It is effective in removing dandruff from the scalp, the decoction being rubbed well into the head while a catnip rinse will impart a healthy gloss to the hair.

Dandruff Rinse: Gather a handful of catnip leaves and tops when in bloom, place in a pan and add 1 pint of boiling water. Let stand until cool, then massage into the scalp for several minutes and rinse off with warm water containing a little lemon juice.

Pet Uses: The effect the herb produces on cats includes sniffing, licking and chewing with head shaking, chin and cheek rubbing and body rubbing. Other members of the cat family experience this catnip response which lasts for 15 minutes to an hour. This response has been found to be inherited as an autosomal dominant gene. About one-third of domestic cats do not enjoy the pleasurable effects of catnip. The effects are not achieved by chewing the plant, rather they are induced by smelling the herb, and the plant must be crushed, bruised or broken to release the chemicals responsible for the effect.

This is an excellent herb to consider for a high-strung animal with a nervous stomach, especially if episodes of vomiting are precipitated by stressful events. Administer 12-20 drops of a glycerin-based catnip tincture for every 20 lbs of an animal's body weight, 10-20 minutes prior to being subjected to stressful circumstances. For travel or other prolonged periods of stress, the tincture can be added to the animal's drinking water—12 drops per 8 oz of water is a good starting dosage.

Other Uses: Researchers found that nepetalactone, the essential oil in catnip that gives the plant its characteristic odor, is about ten times more effective at repelling mosquitoes than DEET — the compound used in most commercial insect repellents. The study showed that nepetalactone is about 10 times more effective than DEET because it takes about one-tenth as much nepetalactone as DEET to have the same effect. Most commercial insect repellents contain about 5 percent to 25 percent DEET. Presumably, much less catnip oil would be needed in a formulation to have the same level of repellency as a DEET-based repellent. A previous study found that catnip also repels cockroaches.

Culinary Uses: The flowers of all catnips are edible, each with subtly different flavors. The lemon catmint does have a mint/thyme/lemon flavor and complements fish dishes. The cultivar *Citriodora* has a mild lemon aroma that is more appealing to most people for culinary purposes. The whole flower is edible. When preparing the flowers for use in a recipe, remove any green bits or the flavor will be impaired as the leaves and stem have a more powerful flavor.

Fresh or dried leaves and young shoots are sometimes used for flavoring sauces, soups and cooked food. The leaves can be rubbed on meat for flavoring or candied with egg white and sugar to serve as after dinner mints.

Recipes:

Eggplant with Catnip

1 lb eggplant
2 oz butter
½ oz fresh catnip, finely chopped

Wash the eggplant and remove the ends. Slice and sauté in butter in a heavy frying pan. Season, then cover and simmer until tender, ensuring that both sides are properly cooked. Before serving, sprinkle with catnip. (The Illustrated Book of Herbs)

Catnip Flower Biscuits

4 oz butter

2 oz caster sugar
6 oz self-raising flour
pinch of salt
1 Tbsp catnip flowers, divided into individual florets

Preheat oven to 450°F. Cream the sugar and butter together until light and fluffy, fold in the flour and salt. Knead into a dough. Roll out and scatter the flowers over the dough and lightly roll in. Make into any shape of your choice with a cutter. Place on a greased baking sheet. Bake for 10-12 minutes. Cool on a wire tray. (Good Enough to Eat)

Grapefruit and Catnip Dessert

2 medium grapefruit
4 oz caster sugar
1 tsp fresh catnip, chopped
1 ½ pint cold water

Peel off the grapefruit rind very thinly, taking care to avoid the white pith. Put into a blender. Remove pith and discard. Coarsely chop the grapefruit flesh and add to the blender with the caster sugar, catnip leaves and cold water. Blend until the mixture is light green. Strain into stemmed glasses and refrigerate until well chilled. Garnish with a red currant leaf or a sprig of catnip. (The Illustrated Book of Herbs)

Conserve of Catnip

Strip the flowers from their stems, weigh them and to every pound of the flowers take 2 lbs of loaf sugar. Crush it, and beat it gradually into the flowers in a mortar. When thoroughly incorporated, pot and tie down for use.

Potato Salad with Pink and Blue Catnip Flowers

2 lb potatoes
½ pint mayonnaise
2 Tbsp mixed catnip flowers, divided into individual florets.

Peel the potatoes and cut into chunks. Put into a pan of boiling water and cook for 10-15 minutes, until firm but not raw. Drain and cool. Cut up into small chunks. Empty mayonnaise into a bowl and stir in one Tbsp of mixed catnip flowers. Add the potatoes and

coat thoroughly. Cover and chill in the refrigerator, scatter on the remaining catnip flowers. (Good Enough to Eat)

For your cat:

Hocus Pocus's Magically Moist Morsels

½ lb ground beef
1 small carrot, finely grated
1 Tbsp grated cheese
1 tsp brewer's yeast
1 tsp dried catnip
½ cup whole wheat bread crumbs
1 egg, beaten
1 Tbsp tomato paste

Preheat the oven to 350F. In a medium-sized bowl, combine the ground beef, carrot, cheese, brewer's yeast, catnip and bread crumbs. Add the egg and tomato paste and mix well. Using your hands, roll the mixture into walnut-sized meatballs and place on a lightly greased cookie sheet. Bake for about 15 minutes until the meatballs are brown and firm. Cool the meatballs completely before storing in an airtight container in the refrigerator. These freeze well. Makes about 2 dozen. Serve to cat at room temperature or slightly warmed in the microwave. (Cat Nips! Feline Cuisine)

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