SPEARMINT

*Mentha spicata*  
[MEN-thuh spi-KAH-tuh]

**Family:** Lamiaceae

**Names:** brown mint, common mint, garden mint, lady’s mint, our lady’s mint, sage of Bethlehem, scotch mint, scotch spearmint, yerba buena, Common spearmint, spearmint, spire mint, green mint, lamb mint, pea mint, fish mint, Adi Nane, Menthol Mint, Midori-Hakka, Mint, Silver Mint

**Description:** a hardy branched perennial herb with bright green lance-shaped, sharply serrated leaves, quickly spreading underground runners and pink or lilac-colored flowers in slender cylindrical spikes. Reaches a height of 2 ½ feet. Spearmint grows about 2 feet tall with reddish purple stems and pale pink or white flowers. There is also a smaller and smoother-leafed variety which is like spearmint gum. Curly mint with light green curly leaves or Kentucky colonel with broader leaves make exquisite juleps. It is hardy to zone 3 and is not frost tender. It is in flower from August to September, and the seeds ripen from September to October. The scented flowers are hermaphrodite and are pollinated by bees. It is noted for attracting wildlife.

**Cultivation:** A very easily grown plant, it succeeds in most soils and situations so long as the soil is not too dry. Grows well in heavy clay soils. A sunny position is best for production of essential oils, but it also succeeds in partial shade. Prefers partial shade and a slightly acid soil. Often grown as a culinary herb in the herb garden, spearmint is also commercially cultivated for its essential oil, the yields are about 3.5 to 4.5 kilos per ton of leaves. Most mints have fairly aggressive spreading roots and, unless you have the space to let them roam, they need to be restrained by some means such as planting them in containers that are buried in the soil. Hybridizes freely with other members of this genus. A good companion plant for growing near cabbages and tomatoes, helping to keep them free of insect pests. Members of this genus are rarely if ever troubled by browsing deer.

Seed - sow spring in a cold frame. Germination is usually fairly quick. Prick out the seedlings into individual pots when they are large enough to handle and plant them out in the summer. Mentha species are very prone to hybridization and so the seed cannot be relied on to breed true. Even without hybridization,
seedlings will not be uniform and so the content of medicinal oils etc will vary. When growing plants with a particular aroma it is best to propagate them by division. Division can be easily carried out at almost any time of the year, though it is probably best done in the spring or autumn to allow the plant to establish more quickly. Virtually any part of the root is capable of growing into a new plant. Larger divisions can be planted out direct into their permanent positions. However, for maximum increase it is possible to divide the roots up into sections no more than 3cm long and pot these up in light shade in a cold frame. They will quickly become established and can be planted out in the summer.

**History:** The most likely parent of peppermint, spearmint is thought to be the oldest of all mints. It is probably the mint mentioned in the Bible. Romans distinguished between the cultivated *mentha* and the wild *mentastra*um, liberally adding both to their cooking. Arabs were also fond of mint, calling it *tudanaj*. Throughout the ancient world, it was much used to keep milk from curdling. In the 16th century, it became *spere myne*, to describe the spear-shaped flowers that distinguish it from many other mints.

**Properties:** Antiemetic; Antiseptic; Antispasmodic; Cancer; Carminative; Diuretic; Poultice; Restorative; Stimulant; Stomachic.

**Nutritional Analysis:** Water: 83 Protein: 4.8 Fat: 0.6 Carbohydrate: 8 Fiber: 2 Ash: 1.6 Calcium: 200 Phosphorus: 80 Iron: 15.6 Vitamin A: 2700 Niacin: 0.4

**Medicinal Uses:** Spearmint is a commonly used domestic herbal remedy. A tea made from the leaves has traditionally been used in the treatment of fevers, headaches, digestive disorders and various minor ailments. The leaves should be harvested when the plant is just coming into flower, and can be dried for later use. The stems are macerated and used as a poultice on bruises. Both the essential oil and the stems are used in folk remedies for cancer.

A poultice prepared from the leaves is said to remedy tumors. Spearmint is still listed in the *Hungarian Pharmacopoeia* as a medicine.

**Aromatherapy Uses:**

**EXTRCTIONS:** essential oil by steam distillation from the flowering tops

**CHARACTERISTICS:** a pale yellow or olive mobile liquid with a warm, spicy-herbaceous, minty odor.

**BLEND**S WELL WITH: lavender, lavandin, jasmine, eucalyptus, basil and rosemary and is often used in combination with peppermint.

**ACTIONS:** anesthetic (local), antiseptic, antispasmodic, astringent, carminative, cephalic, cholagogue, decongestant, digestive diuretic, expectorant, febrifuge, hepatic, nervine, stimulant, stomachic, tonic

**CONSTITUENTS:** L-carvone, dihydrocarvone, phellandrene, limonene, menthone, menthol, pulegone, cineol, linalool, pinenes, among others

**USES:** The properties of spearmint oil resemble those of peppermint but its effects are less powerful…it is better adapted to children’s maladies

**Skin Care:** acne, dermatitis, congested skin

**Respiratory System:** asthma, bronchitis, catarrhal conditions, sinusitis

**Digestive System:** colic, dyspepsia, flatulence, hepatobiliary disorders, nausea, vomiting

**Immune System:** colds, fevers, flu

**Nervous System:** fatigue, headache, migraine, nervous strain, neurasthenia, stress

**Other Uses:** Used as a fragrance component, mainly in soaps and colognes. Used primarily as a flavor ingredient in a wide range of products, including toothpaste, chewing gum, confectionery, alcoholic and soft drinks

**Other Uses:** The plant repels insects and was formerly used as an strewing herb. Rats and mice intensely dislike the smell of mint. The plant was therefore used in homes as a strewing herb and has also been spread in granaries to keep the rodents off the grain.

**Culinary Uses:** Leaves - raw or cooked. A strong spearmint flavor, they are used as a
flavoring in salads or cooked foods. The leaves are often used in ‘mint sauce’, which is used as a flavoring in meals. A herb tea is made from the fresh or dried leaves. It has a very pleasant and refreshing taste of spearmint, leaving the mouth and digestive system feeling clean. An essential oil from the leaves and flowers is used as a flavoring in sweets, ice cream, drinks etc.

Recipes:

**Lahmajoon**

2 large plain unbaked pizzas (or make your own dough and your own pizzas)

1 lb lean ground lamb

1 cup finely minced onion

½ cup minced spearmint

¼ cup minced parsley

¼ tsp finely minced garlic

¼ cup finely minced sweet pepper

3 Tbsp tomato paste

3/4 tsp salt

¼ tsp each freshly ground pepper, ground cumin and chile powder

Olive oil, for brushing

Prepare pizza dough if necessary. In a bowl combine ingredients and mix well. Sauté a small amount of the mixture and adjust seasonings. Brush pizza dough lightly with olive oil. Spread lamb portion on pizza form…..dividing equally. Lightly oil 2 large baking sheets and arrange rounds on them. Bake until edges are golden and topping is bubble (about 15 minutes). Serve immediately. (Cooking from the Gourmet’s Garden)

**Mint Ale**

¼ cup spearmint leaves

¼ cup apple mint leaves

2 cups boiling water

juice of ½ lemon

juice of ½ orange

1 Tbsp white sugar

1 bottle ginger beer or ginger ale

1 sprig of spearmint, orange mint or apple mint

Infuse the spearmint and apple mint leaves for 15 minutes in the boiling water. Strain and add the lemon and orange juice and the sugar. Mix well and chill in the refrigerator. Serve with the ginger beer or ale, ice, and the extra mint as garnish. (Mastering Herbalism)

References:


Resources:

*Companion Plants, www.companionplants.com*

*Possum Creek Herb Farm; www.possumcreek.com*

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