

## YARROW



### *Achillea millefolium*

[ah-KEY-lee-uh mill-ee-FOH-lee-um]

**Family:** Compositae

**Names:** milfoil, thousandleaf, sneezewort, sanguinary, nosebleed, soldier's woundwort, stop bleeding herb, sanguinary, thousand leaf, thousand-leaved clover, bloodwort, wound herb; Seven year's love, old man's mustard, military herb, old man's pepper, thousand seal, hundred-leaved grass, arrow root, eerie, ladies' mantle, knyghten, stanch weed, field hops, gearwe, yarroway, devil's plaything, snake's grass, death flower, stanch griss; Carpenter's Herb, carpenter's grass, gordoloba, green arrow, dog daisy, Plumajillo; herbe des charpentiers, millefeuille (French); Schafgarbe (German); achillea, millefoglie (Italian); Krwawnik Pospolity (Polish); Chiliofila (Greek); Yang Shi Cao (Chinese)

**Description:** low-growing leaves, with straight flower stalks. A height up to 3 feet and a width to 1 foot. The flowers are tight groups of tiny, ¼-inch white flowers, clustered in 3- to 3-inch umbels on stiff, upright stems. Leaves are very finely divided and feathery on stems to 8 inches long, becoming smaller toward the top of the plant. It blooms from June to August.

**Cultivation:** A perennial to Zone 2. It germinates in 10-14 days. Needs light to germinate. Prefers well drained, fairly dry soil. Will tolerate poor soil and is very drought resistant. In the west it only needs to be irrigated every 2-3 weeks; drip irrigation is best. If the soil is really poor then fertilize with manure first. The ideal germination temperature is 78-80F. pH is 4.2-7. Requires full sun and will become straggly in shade. Seeds germinate in 10-20 days are ready for transplanting in 8-12 weeks. Divisions are done in early spring or late fall. Divisions are easy to do but somewhat time consuming to plant. Seedlings are planted out in late spring or early summer. Divisions are planted when they are done in fall or early spring. Spacing is 12-18 inches in the row and the rows are 24-30 inches apart. Blooms start the second year. The flowers are harvested as they start to bloom in summer. The flowers will continue to bloom for several weeks. As flowering begins the top growth up to 8 inches long is cut off and dried in a thin layer. The center of the bed dies back after about 5 years and will need replanting with fresh root division. Yarrow flowers dry readily in 3-5 days. They are 65-70% water.

**History:** Achilles reputedly used yarrow to heal wounds of the Greek troops during the Trojan War, hence its botanical name. It has been used for this purpose for centuries and in Scotland a traditional wound ointment was made from yarrow. The Anglo-Saxons named yarrow *gaeruwe*, from *gearwian*, meaning to "Prepare" or "to treat", referring most likely to its curative properties. Other names, which generally describe yarrow's ability to stop bleeding, include soldier's woundwort, knight's milfoil and *herba militaris*. In Medieval

times, yarrow leaves were tolled and put up the nose to stop bleeding. Its finely divided leaves were the reason for another name, milfoil meaning “many leaves.” Druids used yarrow stalks to divine seasonal weather, while the Chinese cast the I Ching oracle with them to determine the future.

In the Middle ages the name was *Supercilium Veneris* or the “eyebrow of Venus”. Historically plants named after goddesses have been healing remedies for women. Yarrow was among the sacred herbs accompanying the dead on their journey in the middle east. In the Orkney Islands yarrow is widely used for dispelling melancholy. It is an important herb when healing someone burdened by troubled emotions, helping cleanse them of an unhealthy sorrow or a depression which has lasted too long. Albertus Magnus uses yarrow in combination with nettles to treat fear and self-negation. Yarrow was reportedly the first herb placed in the baby Jesus’ hand, perhaps to signal both his healing powers and vulnerability.

Yarrow is one of a handful of plants call allheal in the English herbal tradition. In America it is the “life medicine” and general panacea of the Navajos. People used yarrow as an astringent and made a salve of it to heal sores. Native Americans poured an infusion of the plant tops into the ears of those with earaches, and pioneers drank it for everything from urinary problems to head colds.

**Constituents:** volatile oil with variable content (azulene—up to 51%, borneol, cineole, terpineol, eugenol, trace of thujone, linalool, camphor, sabinene, chamzulene); sesquiterpene lactones, flavonoids, saponins, sterols, glycoalkaloid (achilleine), alkaloids (acilleine); polyacetylenes; triterpenes; salicylic acid; coumarins; tannins, sugars

**Properties:** anti-inflammatory, antipyretic, antirheumatic, antiseptic, antispasmodic, astringent, carminative, cicatrisant, diaphoretic, digestive, expectorant, hemostatic, hypotensive, stomachic, tonic.

**Energetics:** bitter, spicy, neutral

**Meridians/Organs affected:** lungs, liver

**Medicinal Uses:** Due to the flavonoids they contain, yarrow flowers encourage circulation, lower blood pressure and help stop bleeding anywhere in the body. A couple of cups of hot yarrow, peppermint and elder flower tea is an old remedy for reducing fevers and treating colds, measles, and eruptive diseases. It also helps relieve urinary tract infections and stones. The tea benefits the kidneys. Cramps and rheumatism are treated with the tea, as are intestinal gas, diarrhea, anorexia and hyperacidity. In China, yarrow is used in poultices and to ease stomach ulcers. It is said to stop excessive blood flower especially well in the pelvic region, so is used to decrease excessive menstruation, postpartum bleeding, and hemorrhoids. Chewing the fresh leaves relieves toothache. Yarrow contains a chemical also present in chamomile and chamazulene, that helps relax the smooth muscle tissue of the digestive tract, making it an antispasmodic.

Yarrow can be taken in the form of herbal tea, tincture, fresh juice or medicinal wine. It can be used in a bath or on compresses. Sensitive people should perform a patch test before using the fresh juice on their skin. The tea is most effective when ingested in small sips throughout the day. A course of treatment with Yarrow should not last over four weeks, during which time the patient should avoid wine and coffee if possible. The fresh juice has a stronger effect than the tea.

Two animal studies show yarrow protects the liver from toxic chemical damage. And a scientifically conducted trial in India showed yarrow helps treat hepatitis.

*Combinations:*

Fever: elder flower, peppermint, boneset, cayenne and ginger

High blood pressure: hawthorn, lime blossom and mistletoe

**REMEDIES:**

*Tea:* in a small pan, combine 1 tsp of the dried herb, chopped or crumbled, with 1 cup cold water. Cover the pan and bring the mixture to a

quick boil, letting it steep for a while before straining it. A daily dose is 3 cups.

*Yarrow Juice:* gather the youngest leaves possible and process them in a juicer. Dilute this concentrated juice with equal parts of whey or water. Daily dose is 3 Tbsp

*Tincture:* Mix the fresh juice with an equal amount of wine spirits (70% alcohol). Let the mixture steep in a closed container for 3 weeks before straining it into clean dropper bottles. A dose is 30 drops taken 3 times daily.

*Heart Wine:* 2 handfuls minced fresh yarrow herb, 2 handfuls minced fresh lemon balm; 2 Tbsp minced fresh valerian root, 1 tsp ground cinnamon, a liter of good red wine. Prepare the herbs and combine them with the cinnamon and red wine. Let the mixture steep, tightly covered for 3 weeks in a cool, dark place. Strain the wine into dark bottles with a cork or lid. Sip 2 liqueur glasses full daily.

Herbal Sitz Bath for Postpartum support: Make a strong infusion by pouring 1 quart of hot steaming water over 6 Tbsp of comfrey leaves. Add 2-3 tsp of calendula and yarrow flowers of each and steep 30 minutes or longer. Strain the herbs and add the tea into your warm-water sitz bath tub.

Formula for endometriosis: 1 oz chasteberry seed, 2 oz cramp bark, 2 oz yarrow flowers, 2 oz skullcap herb; 1 oz wild yam root. Make into a tea or a tincture and take from ovulation through the end of menses. Continue for a minimum of three months before the effects have a lasting benefit though symptoms should improve within a few days. An average length of one year is absolutely normal.

**HOMEOPATHIC USES:** Homeopaths use *Millefolium* for hemorrhages with bright red blood, hernia, bad effects from falls or overlifting, and continued high temperatures; it is a classic treatment for nosebleed, bloody urine, bleeding from the bowels, bloody coughs and profuse menses with bright red blood.

**ANIMAL USE:** Yarrow aids sheep, goats, horses, and cattle suffering from gastrointestinal problems and flatulence. To treat them, add the herb to their fodder or

administer it as tea or tincture. If the animals are rubbed down with enough fresh yarrow juice to stick to their hides, flies and insects will be kept at bay.

**FLOWER ESSENCE:** Yarrow is a very important and highly beneficial remedy to harmonize the path of spiritualization and connect it to the physical world and to practical responsibilities. Those who typically need this remedy are easily affected by their surroundings, and can be prone to many forms of environmental illness, allergies or psychosomatic diseases. Yarrow helps such a person re-balance and stabilize the abundant light which radiates in the upper energy centers, directing it into the lower centers so that the Self has more vitality and solidity. Yarrow gives integrity and strength to the aura so that we can maintain awareness of the suffering of others without being overwhelmed. In making the essence be sure to use only plants that grow in environmentally perfect conditions, in a place away from pollution and overhead cables.

#### **Aromatherapy Uses:**

**EXTRACTION:** essential oil by steam distillation from the dried herb

**CHARACTERISTICS:** a dark blue or greenish-olive liquid with a fresh, green, sweet-herbaceous, slightly camphoraceous odor. It blends well with cedarwood, pine, chamomile, valerian, vetiver and oakmoss.

#### **USES:**

**Skin Care:** acne, burns, cuts, eczema, hair rinse (promotes hair growth), inflammations, rashes, scars, tones the skin, varicose veins, wounds

**Circulation, Muscles and Joints:** arteriosclerosis, high blood pressure, rheumatoid arthritis, thrombosis

**Digestive System:** constipation, cramp, flatulence, hemorrhoids, indigestion

**Genito-urinary system:** amenorrhea, dysmenorrhea, cystitis and other infections

**Immune System:** colds, fever, flu, etc.

**Nervous System:** hypertension, insomnia, stress-related conditions.

**Toxicity:** Reports that large doses cause headaches, dizziness, and even light sensitivity in some people, although this is not well documented. Yarrow has a tendency to cause allergic skin reactions or sneezing in people sensitive to the aster family. High doses of yarrow may turn urine dark brown. Do not become alarmed.

**Cosmetic Uses:** Yarrow preparations, because of their germicidal and anti-inflammatory properties, make them a good dressing for inflamed, irritated, oily, and blemished complexions. It strengthens, firms, and cleanses the skin. Patch test for those with sensitive skin.

*Face mask:* mash some fresh leaves and place them on the face for 10-15 minutes.

*Astringent:* allow 1 tsp of the dried crushed herb to infuse for about 30 minutes in ¼ pt boiling water and apply it while still fresh. Add the remainder to the bath to help you relax.

**Ritual Uses:** Herb of Venus; gender: cold; Element: water; Part Used: flowers; Basic powers: love, clairvoyance, exorcism. A common herb in love spells, yarrow is included in wedding decorations and hung over the bridal bed to keep a couple together happily for 7 years. Worn as an amulet, it wards off negativity. The tea drunk prior to divination will enhance one's powers of perception. Held in the hand it stops all fear. It is sometimes added to exorcism incenses. The flowers are a welcome addition to any magical altar, as the yarrow is one of the Witch's favorite herbs. Large patches of yarrow growing in a field indicate a very grounded energy spot. Sit there to center and relax.

Modern lore recommends waiting for the first yarrow bloom and using it to make a wish which should manifest prior to the harvest. The flowers are often included in rituals of union and are considered sacred to the Horned God.

“Yarrow, sweet yarrow, the first I have found.

In the name of the Lord, I pluck thee from the ground

As the Lord loves the Lady, so warm and dear,  
So in my dream may my lover appear.”

Traditional love charm

#### **Other Uses:**

##### **Dye:**

1 pot yarrow

1/3 cup alum

1 Tbsp cream of tartar

8 gal water

1 lb wood

Cover the plant material with water and boil it for an hour. Strain out the plant and add enough water to make up the 4 gallons. Meanwhile, mordant the wool in the alum and cream of tartar. Transfer the hot wool into the hot dye ooze and simmer it for ¾ hour or so. Cool and rinse until the water runs clear. Color: Dull yellow.

**Culinary Uses:** Though extremely bitter, yarrow leaves were added 17<sup>th</sup> century salads. The Swedes, calling it “field hop,” made their beer with it. Young leaves can be added to salads and sandwiches. Wash flowers well before using. Divide the clusters, separating the individual flowers.

#### **Recipes:**

##### **Yarrow, Mushroom and Beansprouts Salad**

5 whole yarrow flowers

petals from 10 yarrow flowers

5 young yarrow leaves, finely chopped

12 oz button mushrooms, sliced

4 oz beansprouts, well washed

1 Tbsp olive oil

1 Tbsp lemon juice

1 clove of garlic, peeled and crushed

Prepare the yarrow flowers. Chop the yarrow leaves very finely, then mix them with the yarrow petals, mushrooms and bean sprouts in a bowl. Whisk the oil, lemon juice and crushed garlic in a small container, pour over the salad and toss. Garnish with the whole yarrow flowers. (Good Enough to Eat)

### **Tomatoes Stuffed with Pine Nuts and Yarrow Flowers and Petals**

4 large tomatoes  
½ oz butter  
1 Tbsp onion, finely chopped  
3 oz breadcrumbs  
1 egg, beaten  
2 Tbsp pine nuts  
1 Tbsp yarrow petals  
8 yarrow flowers  
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Cut the tops off the tomatoes and hollow out the insides with a small teaspoon. Stand upside down to drain while you make the filling. Melt the butter in a saucepan, brown the onion gently and add the breadcrumbs and egg. As the mixture begins to thicken add the pine nuts and finally, when all is mixed together, season to taste. Leave to cool. When cool, stir in the yarrow petals. Put the mixture back into the tomato shells, place in a serving dish and sprinkle with the flowers. Serve as a starter or as a light main course with a green salad. (Good Enough to Eat)

### **Yarrow Soup**

1 colander yarrow leaves  
2 Tbsp butter  
1 Tbsp flour  
1 pint stock or water in which the yarrow has cooked  
salt and freshly milled black pepper  
1¼ cups milk  
nutmeg  
1 Tbsp thick cream

Wash the leaves and put them in a saucepan containing 3 or 4 tablespoons boiling water. Cook gently for 10 minutes, drain the leaves and reserve the cooking water, if using instead of stock. Melt the butter in the saucepan, add the finely sliced onion and sauté until soft. Shake in the flour, stir to blend, and gradually add the stock or vegetable water, keep stirring while the soup thickens, then add the yarrow leaves and a seasoning of salt and pepper. Cover the pan and simmer gently for 15 minutes. Rub the soup through a sieve or food mill, and return to the pan. Heat the milk

until nearly boiling and stir into the soup, add good grating of nutmeg, and just before serving, stir in the cream. (All Good Things Around Us)

### **Yarrow as a Vegetable**

1 colander yarrow leaves (younger leaves from the middle and top of the plant.)  
water  
salt and pepper  
butter

Soak the leaves for ten minutes and then wash them thoroughly. Put the leaves in a saucepan with 3-4 tablespoons water and a pinch of salt. Cook briskly for 10 minutes. Drain, and return to the pan with a knob of butter and a good grinding of freshly milled black pepper. Serve hot. A white sauce can be added which makes the yarrow taste more like creamed spinach. (All Good Things Around Us)

**Other Uses:** All of the species dry well and are often used in dried herb and flower arrangements. Biodynamic gardeners use small amounts of yarrow leaf preparations to speed compost decomposition. A substance exuded by the roots is said to increase the disease resistance of nearby plants. It is an insect repellent, although it also inhibits seed germination in the soil. Yarrow has been mixed with tobacco and snuff for flavoring.

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#### **Resources:**

Companion Plants, [www.companionplants.com](http://www.companionplants.com)  
plants, seed

Crimson Sage, <http://www.crimson-sage.com>  
Plants

The Rosemary House, [www.therosemaryhouse.com](http://www.therosemaryhouse.com)  
tincture

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