



Backyard Remedies

Growing Your Own Medicinal Garden

By Verna Gates



For centuries, medicine grew among us in gardens and in the wilderness. Practitioners of healing gathered and prepared the plants that soothed and often cured ailments from scratched fingers to depression.

Today, you can grow a beautiful garden, filled with colorful flowers that also serve as first aid remedies. Try some of these plants in your garden and take advantage of their additional benefits.

Yarrow

When the Greeks went to Troy, Achilles, warrior and famed healer, joined the battle. Virtually immune to arrows, he carried the injured into camp and healed their wounds with the plant bearing his name, *Achillea millefolia*, known today as yarrow.

Hundreds of years later, we find that Yarrow possesses active anti-bacterial components and works as a styptic pencil to stop bleeding. "Gather up the leaves and bind them to a wound," says Ila Hatter, interpretative naturalist at Great Smoky Mountains National Park and consultant on the A&E documentary, *In the Shadow of Cold Mountain*.



Purple Coneflower

Long ago in North America, the old medicine men first rinsed their hands in this plant before plunging them into the hot coals. The *Echinacea purpurea*, or purple coneflower, was considered so powerful it gave them command over fire.



Today the roots, leaves and stems of the purple coneflower are useful in building immune systems.

Rose Hips

Before you get a cold, prevent it with vitamin C from rose hips. Few flowers compare in beauty to the rose. The *Rosa rugosa* stands as a homely cousin to showier

March

Search:

Go



FREE NEWS
Click For
Subscribe

Week

Which do you

- Fresh
- Dried
- Artificial

Su

See the latest

Teach
the M

Techn
Ce

Your F

How do you
iParenting?
chance to te
online poll a
voice

cultivars, but grows the large rose hips packed with vitamin C. Collect the rose hips and toss them into salads or eat like blueberries.

St. John's Wort

St. John's Wort was originally known as a cure for madness. The fuzzy yellow flowers of the *Hypericum perforatum* cheer up the garden and, supposedly, the user. St. John's Wort is often prescribed as a natural treatment for depression.

Bee Balm

Good medicine begins with a good diet, and if you don't have one, mint will help keep your stomach settled. Bee Balm, or *Monarda didyma*, was once considered the patriotic drink after a bunch of Bostonians dumped English tea into the harbor. It contains thymol, according to Hatter, which is the antiseptic in Listerine.

Hot mint tea cools and helps relieve congestion. Boil fresh or dried leaves in water for tea or spruce up a salad or drink with a sprig.

Feverfew

Modern life seems to bring us more than a few headaches, many of which can be relieved just by the sight of white flowers. But feverfew, or *Chrysanthemum parthenium*, does wonders according to Hatter. Migraine sufferers who eat a daily leaf apparently can reduce the frequency and intensity of headaches. A tea from dried leaves can help as well.

Mullein

Every garden needs a guardian plant and mullein is the legendary protector of the home, warding off evil spirits. This tall yellow sentinel, also called *Verbascum*, puts out fuzzy leaves that work as a pad for your shoes to supposedly give you strength. These same leaves can be dried and made into tea that is supposed to be good for bronchitis and asthma. Or let the flowers soak in oil and place a drop or two of the liquid in a sore ear to relieve the pain, according to Hatter.

The Viola Family

A spring and winter delight in your medicinal garden pops up in the happy faces of the viola family. Pansies, violets, Johnny-jump-ups: All of the violas are high in vitamin C and contain rutin, which builds capillaries. "Eating violets is a pretty way to strengthen your blood vessels," says Hatter. "In the spring, we make flower salads, and violet is a sweet addition. Besides, 1 cup of leaves has more vitamin C than an orange."

Just Don't Pull These Up

There is a theory among old herbalists that a plant that loves people and grows abundantly around them wants to help and heal them. Several of our "weeds" actually are marvelous medicines if you can only learn to live with them in your medicinal garden. Think of all the effort you'll save by not weeding.

Few plants love people like the dandelion, or *Taraxacum officinale*. Believe it or not, this plant was introduced as a food crop; few things are more nutritious. The dandelion plant is richer in vitamin A than carrots. The flowers contain lecithin, a fat emulsifier and triglyceride reducer. A tea from the leaves is mildly diuretic and acts as a laxative, making it a great diet drink.



One of our greatest threats to health points to overweight bodies. The ancient cure for obesity was the chickweed, or *Stellaria media*, that loves to infest our lawns. The little green plant with the star-like white flowers contains saponins, which according to herbalist Susun Weed, helps wash out the fat. This little plant can repopulate five generations in a growing season. Keeping it in the salad bowl makes a fine way to control it – and the waistline.



Colors, such as bold purples and bright yellows, will accompany this medicinal garden from spring until fall. The temperature-hardy pansies and violets announce spring; the purple coneflower, bee balm and St. John's Wort reign in summer; Mullein reaches its peak in fall. Whether you test their medicinal properties or just enjoy their beauty, you will nurture a garden both unique and practical.

Safety Precautions

Before using any medicinal plant, please ensure its safety by:

- Making an absolutely positive identification;
- Never using plants sprayed with herbicides, pesticides or exposed to carbon monoxide;
- Picking herbs just before flowering for maximum potency.

Want to see more?

- [Breathe Easy: Natural Approaches to Asthma](#)
- [Holistic Help: Treating Depression Naturally](#)
- [Nature's Pharmacy: Revealing the Secrets of Holistic Health](#)
- [Talk about it!](#)

About the Author: Verna Gates is a freelance writer.

[Back to the index](#)



<http://homestyletoday.com> © 2003 iParenting, LLC. All Rights Reserved.
Please read the important [disclaimer](#) regarding material presented on this site and our [Privacy Policy Statement](#).
Comments or questions? [We'd love to hear from you](#). Like what you see?

[Tell a friend!](#)