

Kitchen Apothecary: culinary herbs for health and happiness



Culinary and Medicinal Herbs you are probably already growing:

Lavender is antiseptic, antibacterial and a mild analgesic. It can be used to repel insects and in aromatherapy can relieve stress and headaches. Often used in bath and body products lavender is also the distinctive flavor of “herbes de Provence” which is great on roasted chicken or potatoes.

Elderberry is a great immune supporting herb. Elderflowers can help with fevers and the fruit is antiviral. Traditional recipes for elderflower cordials, elderberry syrup and elderberry jelly are easy to find. CAUTION: not all parts of the plant are edible so do some research before using elder internally.

Thyme is a classic culinary herb found as a base flavor in stocks, soup and sauces. Medicinally, thyme is antiseptic and commonly used in throat and bronchial issues. Try sipping tea made with lots of thyme and sweetened with honey the next time you have a cough or sore throat.

Fennel has a strong anise flavor and is often used in desserts, digestifs and after dinner drinks. It is known as a carminative which means it helps to expel gas from the intestines! I usually keep a jar of fennel seeds around to chew after a meal to sweeten my breath. In India, this post-meal seed chew is called Mukhwas.

Basil is one of the flavors of summer, it is used in Mediterranean, Indian, and south east Asian cuisines. Holy basil or Tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*) is considered an adaptogen. Add basil to sweet and savory dishes throughout the summer when it is in abundance. Puree with olive oil and freeze in small portions to have the fresh flavor throughout the year.

Garlic boosts immune system and has beneficial impacts on the digestive system, liver and circulatory system. Garlic lends its spiciness to condiments like pesto, kimchee and gremolata.

Lemon balm has strong antiviral properties- keep plenty of dried lemon balm in your cupboard for teas throughout the winter to help ward off the flu. Used as tea and in aromatherapy it can soothe frayed nerves and calm hyper children. This herb can grow so quickly and abundantly, you can utilize large amounts by throwing armfuls of it in your bath water or trampling it while in the shower. Aromatherapy indeed!

Chamomile is an anti-inflammatory that soothes itchy skin and can relieve inflammation associated with arthritis. Sipped in tea and used in aromatherapy chamomile relieves stress and relaxes tension. Its floral vanilla and pineapple scent lends appeal in baked goods, ice cream and other sweet treats.

Mint is energizing, restorative and revitalizing. Its coolness can be used topically to alleviate discomfort from bee stings, insect bites and burns. Culinary uses are vast, with this herb showing up in everything from mint chutney to mint chocolate chip ice cream. And of course mojitos!