

LEMON BALM - *Melissa officinalis*, Lamiaceae family

Common names: Melissa, Sweet balm, Honey plant, Balm mint, Garden balm, English balm, and Heart's delight.

Parts used: Leaves.

Constituents: Essential Oil, flavonoids, triterpenes, polyphenols, tannins, volatile oil, phenolics.

Taste/Energetics: Cooling, drying, sweet, sour.

Actions: Nervine, carminative, mood-lifting, diaphoretic, hypotensive, antiviral.

Contraindications: Not recommended for pregnant or chestfeeding folks and people with thyroid issues. Lemon Balm can cause drowsiness and should therefore not be consumed prior to operating machinery or driving.

Drug interaction: May have interactions with medication for mental health conditions.

Dosage: Capsules: Take 300 to 500 mg dried lemon balm, 3 times daily or as needed. Tea: 3g – 12g grams (1/4 to 1 tsp.) of dried lemon balm herb in hot water. Steep and drink up to 4 times daily. For fresh herbs – use 1x handfuls infused in hot water Tincture (1:5 in 40%): Take 2-6ml three times daily. Topical: Apply topical cream to affected area, 3 times daily or as directed.

Botany

Bushy perennial from the mint family with lemon scented leaves and white to purple flowers. Native to Europe, central Asia and Iran, but is now naturalised around the world. Easy to grow, will take over a patch very easily. Grows from cuttings and can be propagated through division.

Nervous system

Lemon balm is a calming herb that eases stress, anxiety, and digestive discomfort, and promotes restful sleep. It supports the nervous system during prolonged stress, balances mood, and helps with anxiety, mild depression, nerve pain, and stress-related heart symptoms. Lemon balm also soothes digestive spasms, headaches, and insomnia, and benefits children with nightmares or performance anxiety. Its active compounds boost calming neurotransmitters, supporting emotional resilience and protecting the nervous system from age-related decline.

Immunity

Lemon balm is a potent antiviral herb, particularly effective against herpes simplex virus (causing cold sores) when applied topically as a diluted essential oil or cream. Its tannins and eugenol have antiviral, antibacterial, and muscle-soothing effects. When taken orally as a tea or tincture, lemon balm may help address viral infections systemically. It also supports recovery from colds, flu, and fevers, making it a useful remedy for children, either as a tea in combination with herbs like elderflower, chamomile, and peppermint, or as a bath. Lemon balm's volatile oils offer antibacterial, antifungal, and antihistamine benefits, aiding in the relief of coughs,

catarrh, hay fever, and allergic rhinitis. Its rosmarinic acid is an antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and supports immune function.

Digestive system

Lemon balm is a powerful carminative and antispasmodic herb that relieves flatulence, indigestion, spasms, and digestive discomfort, particularly when triggered by stress or anxiety. It eases heartburn, supports the absorption of nutrients (notably fatty foods), and stimulates the flow of digestive enzymes. Lemon balm's sedative and antispasmodic actions reduce pain, bloating, colic, nausea, IBS, and gastritis, while its antimicrobial properties support gut immunity. It's bitter, gently stimulating the liver and gallbladder.

Hyperthyroidism

Lemon balm helps manage hyperthyroidism by inhibiting thyroid activity and relieving its symptoms. When the thyroid is overactive, it can cause nervousness, anxiety, insomnia, heart palpitations, and digestive issues. Lemon balm's calming effect supports the nervous, cardiovascular, and digestive systems, shifting the body toward relaxation and easing symptoms like a racing heart or impaired digestion. While not a cure, lemon balm offers meaningful mental, emotional, and physical relief for those coping with hyperthyroidism.

Topical use

Lemon balm is a versatile topical remedy. It acts as an antiseptic for cuts and wounds and soothes allergic reactions with its antihistamine properties. Diluted lemon balm oil can be massaged into the skin for period pain, neuralgia, joint and muscle aches, mumps, and used in lotions for cold sores, athlete's foot, and insect stings. Add it to herbal steams to relieve congestion and spasmodic coughs. As a mouthwash, it helps with ulcers, gum infections, and toothache. Combine with mullein and garlic oil for ear infections.

Lemon Balm ice cream

300ml double cream

1 lemon, zest and juice

1 jar good quality lemon curd

50g meringues, broken into chunky pieces

2 tbsp chopped fresh lemon balm

3 passionfruit, halved, pulp and seeds scooped out

sprigs of lemon balm, to garnish

Line a 450g/1lb loaf tin with cling film, overlapping the sides. Whisk the cream lightly until the whisk leaves a trail, add the lemon zest and juice and half the jar of lemon curd then fold in the meringue and chopped lemon balm.

Spoon the mixture into the loaf tin, cover with cling film and freeze for at least six hours.

If the ice cream has been freezing overnight or longer, remove it from the freezer for 10-15 minutes before turning onto a plate. Lift the ice cream from the loaf tin, invert it onto a board and remove the clingfilm. Dip a sharp knife in boiling water and cut the ice cream into thick slices.

Mix the other half of the lemon curd with the pulp and seeds from the passion fruit. Place a slice of ice cream on a plate and top with a spoonful of the passionfruit sauce. Decorate with sprigs of lemon balm.

Recipe from Mary Berry.

References:

The Complete Herbal Tutor, Anne McIntyre

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