

*Achillea millefolium*

[Synonyms : *Achillea ambigua*, *Achillea borealis* subsp. *arenicola*, *Achillea borealis* subsp. *californica*, *Achillea lanulosa*, *Achillea lanulosa* subsp. *alpicola*, *Achillea laxiflora*, *Achillea magna*, *Achillea millefolium* var. *alpicola*, *Achillea millefolium* var. *arenicola*, *Achillea millefolium* var. *californica*, *Achillea millefolium* var. *gigantea*, *Achillea millefolium* var. *lanulosa*, *Achillea millefolium* var. *litoralis*, *Achillea millefolium* var. *pacifica*, *Achillea millefolium* var. *puberula*, *Achillea millifolium*, *Achillea pecten-veneris*, *Achillea subhirsuta*, *Chamaemelum millefolium*, *Millefolium officinale*]

**YARROW** is a perennial. Native to western Asia and Europe (including Britain) it has tiny white flowers.

It is also known as *Achillea* (Italian), *Achillée* (French-Canadian), *Achillée millefeuille* (French), *Ahmindelig rollike* (Danish), *Aivastusjuuri* (Finnish), *Ajdučica* (Serbian), *Akantupakki* (Finnish), *Akileo milfolia* (Esperanto), *Alcanfor* (Mexican, Spanish), Angel flower, *Armanc* (Slovenian), *Armanj* (Croatian), *Aspra* (Serbian), Bad man's plaything, *Beli ravanj* (Serbian), *Belo ivansko cveče* (Serbian), Bloodwort, Bunch o' daisies, Camel, Cammock, Carpenter's grass, Carpenter's weed, *Ciento en rama* (Mexican, Spanish), Common milfoil, Common yarrow, Deadman's daisy, Devil's nettle, Devil's plaything, Dog daisy, *Duizendblad* (Dutch), *Erman* (Slovenian), *Espuma-do-mar* (Portuguese), Field hop, *Flor de la pluma* (Spanish), *Gandana* (Hindi), *Gemeine Schafgarbe* (German), *Gewöhnliche Wiesen-Schafgarbe* (German), *Gewoon duizendblad* (Dutch), Goose tongue, Gordaldo, Gordoloba, Green arrow, *Grenki rman* (Slovenian), *Hak-sintsh* (Winnebago North American Indian), Hemming and sewing, *Herbe à dindes* (French-Canadian), *Herbe au charpentier* (French), *Herbe aux coupures* (French), *Herbe aux militaires* (French), *Herbe de St.Jean* (French), *Hierba de las Cortaduras* (Spanish), Hundred-leaved grass, *Husí jazýček* (Czech), *Jalovi mesečnjak* (Serbian), *Jermanec* (Slovenian), *Jezičec* (Croatian), *Jutrocel* (Croatian), *Kačak* (Croatian), Knight's milfoil, *Kočiči ocas* (Czech), *Korancelj* (Slovenian), *Korocelj* (Slovenian), *Koromačić* (Croatian), *Kostenica* (Croatian), *Kostretica* (Croatian), *Krwawnik pospolity* (Polish), *Kučja trava* (Serbian), *Kunika* (Serbian), Lace plant, Ladies' mantle, *Ljutica* (Serbian), *Malankovica* (Croatian), *Mali stozlat* (Croatian), Melancholy, *Mesečina* (Croatian, Serbian), *Mezinec* (Slovenian), *Milddail* (Welsh), *Milefolio* (Spanish), *Milefólio* (Portuguese), *Milenrama* (Spanish), Milfoil, *Milhojas* (Argentinian, Spanish), *Millefeuille* (French), *Millefoglie* (Italian), *Millefoglio* (Italian), Milfoil, Moleery-fea, Mother of thousands, *Mrmanj* (Croatian), *Myší chvost obyčajný* (Slovak), *Myší ocásek* (Czech), *Myšohvost obyčajný* (Slovak), Noble yarrow, Nosebleed, Nose pepper, Old man's mustard, Old man's pepper, *Paprac* (Croatian, Serbian), *Plumajillo* (Spanish), Poor man's pepper, *Puranski jezičec* (Croatian), *Querpentière* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), *Ravan* (Serbian), *Rebrac* (Croatian), *Řebříček obecný* (Czech), *Reza* (Croatian), *Rmanac* (Croatian), *Rmanc* (Slovenian), *Rölleka* (Swedish), *Röllika* (Swedish), *Runica* (Slovenian), *Ryllik* (Norwegian), Sanguinary, Savory tea, *Schafgarbe* (German), *Seiyou no kogirisou* (Japanese), *Siänkärsämö* (Finnish), Snake's grass, Sneezefoil, Sneezewort, Sneezings, *Soldaterurt* (Danish), Soldier's woundwort, *Spor* (Croatian, Serbian), Staunchweed, *Stolika* (Croatian), *Stolistak* (Croatian), *Stolistnik* (Serbian), Sweetnuts, Tansy,

*Tausendblatt* (German), *Tchèrpentchiéthe* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), Thousandleaf, Thousand-leaf clover, Thousand-leaf grass, Thousand seal, Thousand weed, *Tintorova trava* (Serbian), Toothache weed, Traveller's ease, *Tučija trava* (Croatian), *Tysjacelistnik obyknovennyj* (Russian), *Vanlig Ryllik* (Norwegian), Venus-tree, Western yarrow, White yarrow, *Wiesen-Schafgarbe* (German), Wild pepper, Woundwort, Yallow, *Yaroo* (Japanese), Yarra grass, Yarrel, Yarroway, Yarrow bloodwort, Yarrow milfoil, *Y Wilffrai* (Welsh), *Zaječí chléb* (Czech), *Zavrelec* (Slovenian), and *Zevrelčec* (Slovenian); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of cure for heartache, and war.

Warning – yarrow causes headaches, and vertigo if taken internally in large doses. Extended use can make the skin light sensitive and cause skin rashes. It should not be used medicinally during pregnancy. Yarrow can add an undesirable bitter taste to milk if eaten in large quantities by cows.

*Millefolium* is derived from Latin *mille-* (thousand) and *-folia* (leaved) components meaning 'many leaved'.

The English common name Yarrow comes from the Old English name for the plant *geavre* while the name Milfoil is a corruption of the Norman French name *Millefeuille* given again because of its finely cut, feathery leaves.

Yarrow was a sacred plant to the ancient Chinese and was accredited with spiritual qualities. Today the Chinese still use dried yarrow stems when foretelling the future ie. *I Ching* sticks, which in the oldest and most complex method can involve as many as fifty of them.

In Europe the Druids used yarrow stems to divine weather. While for most Britains (and Frenchmen and Irishmen) the plant was believed to be able to give protection from evil spirits and on Midsummer Eve particularly garlands of yarrow adorned homes and churches. Not only was it used as a defence against witches, being strewn across entrances and tied to babies' cradles for this purpose, but the witches themselves included it in their potions. It also played a role in quite a few love divination rituals. One superstition held that a patient could be cured of fever if a leaf was pulled off with the left hand and eaten while speaking the patient's name.

Brides often carried the flower in their bouquets. If yarrow was on the menu at the wedding feast the bride and groom would be ensured seven years of love, but they would have been reminded when passing through the churchyard for the wedding ceremony that the sight of yarrow growing there was said to be a reproach because the incumbent of the nearest grave had failed to eat yarrow broth.

While yarrow has provided an ingredient for snuff and in Sweden it has been smoked as tobacco, the 17<sup>th</sup> Century English added small quantities of the leaves to salads. Stems removed, the feathery leaves were also boiled as a vegetable and served with butter. At about the same time in Sweden, the plant was being used to make beer – which Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778) the Swedish naturalist and physician who established the basis for the modern scientific nomenclature of plants and animals, contended was more potent than that made from hops (*Humulus*). In Germany yarrow leaves have offered an ingredient for soups. While Danish Faeroe Islanders (off the Scottish coast) have chosen yarrow to flavour schnapps (and some authorities suggest it has also been used to flavour vodka in Russia).

Today commercially a distillation of the plant is used in cosmetics (often as an alternative to chamomile, *Chamaemelum nobile*) and this is also employed as an ingredient by the drinks industry.

The plant's association with healing wounds (whether suffered at home, perhaps from over-enthusiastic carpentry or inflicted on the battlefield) and the claims made for its ability to

encourage the quick formation of skin tissue go back for thousands of years. For the ancient Greeks Achilles was supposed to have used the leaves to heal his soldiers' gashes. And back in western Europe until only relatively recently inhabitants of the Scottish Highlands maintained the long held tradition of applying yarrow to wounds too. In parts of Europe the leaves were also relied upon for stemming nosebleeds for which purpose they were formed into a tightly rolled wad.

On the other side of the Atlantic some of the North American Indian tribes were familiar with the medicinal qualities of yarrow as well. Although these attributes were of prime importance however some tribes took advantage of the plant in other ways too. For instance the Blackfoot made a tea from the leaves and flowers, and the Klamath tribe believed it had preservative qualities as they put stems, leaves and flowers inside fish for this purpose. The leaves were once used by the Kutenai tribe to make perfumes and colognes, and the Klallam Indians used the seeds for household fragrances. The florets were smoked by some of the Chippewa tribe during rituals, the Okanagan-Colville believed that the leaves and stems had insecticidal properties and could repel mosquitoes, and some of the Cree Indians used the dried flowers in bait for catching lynx. The Potawatomi were unaware that they had sympathy with some European superstition when they believed that smoke rising from seed heads placed on live coals gave protection from evil spirits. And mention of live coals brings to mind reports by some authorities of rituals in the Zuni tribe which involved some of the men who were apparently required to pass embers over their bodies and 'swallow' live coals. Before playing with fire they are said to have smeared their skin with a chewed mixture of yarrow root and flowers and used this as a liquid as well to rinse their mouths. Then after the ordeal they bathed their skin with the liquid again.

Some tribes used yarrow for hair treatments. The Okanagan-Colville included the leaves and stems as an ingredient in a shampoo, and the Cowlitz tribe washed their hair with a leaf infusion. Other uses included the prescription of a plant infusion by the Mohican tribe to enhance appetite, and the use of a plant decoction to treat snake and insect bites by both the Thompson Indians and the Okanagan-Colville tribe. Yarrow also seems to have been popular for easing toothache – the roots or leaves were used in different ways to achieve this by the Paiute, Okanagan-Colville, Mahuna, Creek, Thompson, Cree and Saanich tribes.

Yarrow was of value in a veterinary context. The Chippewa gave their horses a decoction of stalks and leaves as a stimulant, and the Blackfoot tribe applied a plant infusion as an eye wash.

The medicinal uses of yarrow amongst the North American Indian tribes were legion. Although by no means comprehensive the following applications well illustrate this. Leaf infusions and plant decoctions were used variously by the Algonkin, Flathead, Klallam, Kwakiutl, Micmac, Abnaki, Carrier, Yuki, Nitinaht, Cbeyenne, Paiute and Miwok tribes to treat colds, while a root infusion was preferred by the Thompson and Okanagan-Colville Indians. Stomach and bowel disorders could often be treated with a root or plant infusion by the Mohican tribe and the Squaxin, Cherokee, Iroquois, Thompson, Okanagan-Colville, Mendocino Indian, Blackfoot, Gosiute, Hesquiat and Cowlitz tribes. Rheumatism was eased by Flathead Indians and Gosiute, Blackfoot, Iroquois and Quileute Indians with poultices of leaf, flower or plant. Poison ivy (*Rhus radicans*) symptoms were treated with a leaf infusion by the Shuswap tribe, and the Iroquois used a plant infusion for treating sunstroke. A leaf or plant infusion seems to have been valued by the Cherokee Indians and the Montagnais, Menominee, Cheyenne, Iroquois, Abnaki and Flathead Indians for easing fever. The Chehalis tribe together with the Skagit, Snohomish, Thompson, Iroquois and Okanagan-Colville tribes used the plant as a remedy

for diarrhoea. And so it goes on – records show that at least 60 of the North American Indian tribes turned to yarrow not only to treat those disorders already mentioned but others including headaches, kidney ailments, breast abscesses, burns and wounds, dysentery, childbirth, nosebleeds, swellings and sprains, boils and sores, sore throats, piles, disturbed sleep, tuberculosis, liver disorders, worms in children, lung ailments, heart problems, venereal diseases, nausea and bruises.

Its medicinal qualities were not lost on many of the settlers on the North American Continent as well as their successors. Among combatants during the American Civil War (1861-1865) yarrow was familiar to many as Soldier's woundwort – the crushed plant that was often applied to their wounds.

Medicinally, yarrow was recommended by European herbalists for treating external and internal injuries, for ulcers and abscesses and for toothache, nosebleeds and kidney disorders. It not only offered a remedy for preventing hair falling out but also yet another so-called 'cure' for baldness. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century it was still being employed in treatments for period problems, wind, colds, measles, kidney disorders, chronic dysentery, diarrhoea, indigestion, bleeding from the lungs, and urinary ailments. Today it can be used especially as a remedy for rheumatism, colds, catarrh, fever, toothache, boils, piles and some period problems. Then apart from any direct beneficial medicinal qualities yarrow has the unusual ability of being able to enhance the medicinal properties of other plants.

It is the birthday flower for 16<sup>th</sup> January.