

*Aloysia triphylla*

[Synonyms : *Aloysia citriodora*, *Lippia citriodora*, *Lippia triphylla*, *Verbena citriodora*, *Verbena triphylla*, *Zapania citriodora*]

**LEMON VERBENA** is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to Argentina, Chile and Peru it has pale lilac or white flowers.

It is also known as *Aloysie* (German), *Cedronella* (Italian), *Echte Verbene* (German), *Erba cedrina* (Italian), *Erba Luigia* (Italian), Herb Louisa, Lemon beebush, Lemon plant, Lemon-scented verbena, *Lippia* (Finnish, French, Swedish), *Luweis* (Arabic), Scented verbena, Sweet-scented verbena, Verbena, *Verbena odorosa* (Italian), Verbena oil-plant, *Verveine* (French), *Verveine citronelle* (French), *Verveine odorante* (French), *Vervena* (Spanish), and *Zitronenstrauch* (German); and in flower language it is said to be a symbol of 'pray for me' and 'tender and quick emotion'.

Fresh twigs collected just before flowering are distilled to yield the fragrant yellowish essential oil known as 'Spanish verbena'.

Warning – prolonged or excessive internal use can cause gastric irritation and chapped or bleeding lips. Prolonged handling can cause dermatitis.

Lemon verbena comes from a different family to that of lemon balm.

*Triphylla* is made up of Greek *tri-* (three) and *phyllo-* (leaf) components.

Introduced to Britain around 1784 (having first been brought to Spain in 1768 for its essential oil) lemon verbena was used in perfumery. The essence also came to be added to the water in finger bowls laid out at banquets to give the bathing liquid a lemon scent. Today the perfumery industry tends to use essence of lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citratus*) more often than that of lemon verbena but the leaves are still to be found in pot-pourris. It is also used by the toiletry industry in soaps.

The plant is also grown in Europe for its ornamental qualities.

Lemon verbena leaves are used in some parts of South America to make a sedative tea. In Europe as a digestive aid, a tisane (medicinal decoction) of lemon verbena became so popular in France that it progressed to being served in bars and cafés and is familiar there today as *verveine odorante*. The essential oil is in fact a commercial ingredient used today by the drinks industries eg. in French liqueurs.

The oil is also used commercially in insecticides for certain mites.

Medicinally, herbalists have recommended an infusion of the leaves to treat indigestion and wind particularly, and have also prescribed it in remedies for colds, sinus ailments, and diarrhoea. Today it is still believed that it could assist in curing some digestive complaints and bacterial infections.