

Mentha spicata

[Synonyms : *Mentha cordifolia*, *Mentha crispa*, *Mentha crispata*, *Mentha longifolia*, *Mentha longifolia* var. *mollissima*, *Mentha longifolia* var. *undulata*, *Mentha spicata* var. *longifolia*, *Mentha sylvestris*, *Mentha viridis*]

COMMON MINT is a creeping perennial. Native to southern Europe it has tiny pale lilac flowers.

It is also known as Brownmint, Creekmint, *Erba Santa Maria* (Italian), Fish mint, *Frauen Munze* (German), Garden mint, Green lamb mint, Green mint, *Grönmynta* (Swedish), *Hierbabuena* (Spanish), *Húng* (Vietnamese), Lamb mint, Mackerel mint, Mary's herb, *Máta klasnatá* (Czech), *Meenchi* (Singhalese), *Menta verde* (Spanish), *Menthe dé gardin* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), *Menthe de Notre Dame* (French), *Menthe douce* (French), *Menthe verte* (French), *Mintys Ysbigog* (Welsh), *Naghniegh* (Maltese), Our Lady's mint, *Paharipudina* (Hindi, Punjabi), Pea mint, *Phudino* (Gujarati), *Pudina* (Bengali), Sage of Bethlehem, Spearmint, Spire mint, *Tudanaj* (Arabic), and *Viherminttu* (Finnish); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of 'burning love', 'let us be friends again', virtue, and 'warmth of sentiment'.

Spicata is derived from Latin *spica* (ear of corn, spike) meaning 'spiky, spiked or in spikes'.

This species was known to the ancient Greeks and the Romans and was also popular with the Arabs.

It is believed to have been introduced to northern and western Europe by the Romans, and it is likely that the Pilgrim Fathers took common mint plants on their 6-week voyage across the Atlantic in a confined space which ended on the shores of Massachusetts in November 1620.

Common mint was one of the plants used to prevent milk from curdling. Today it is probably the variety most often chosen in the West for making mint sauce.

Many believe still that bunches of mint on the windowsill keep flies out of the house, and in the early 20th Century freshly picked mint was put in water and left in the rooms of closed-up houses as it was believed that the air would then remain fresh for the householder's return.

North American Indian tribes came to know common mint. While the Yuki, Kawaiisu, and Miwok Indians all used it to make a tea, the Cherokee tribe added the leaves to food as a flavouring.

For the Yuki Indian tribe the plant provided a body perfume.

Several North American tribes took advantage of the plant's medicinal qualities. Both the Iroquois and Cherokee Indians took it for colds and fever, and the Iroquois also used it to treat hay fever and typhoid, took it as a snuff for headaches, and gave it to their children when it was necessary to cause vomiting. The Iroquois also thought it was safe to give to children for stomach upsets – and it was used for this purpose by Iroquois adults and members of the Miwok and Cherokee tribes too. The latter used common mint to treat urinary problems, vomiting, piles and wind, and also gave it as a stimulant – and they and the Mahuna in addition valued sedative qualities in the plant. Mohican Indians used common mint to treat worms, and the Miwok prescribed it for diarrhoea. Apart from all

this the Cherokee also appreciated the plant's strong taste and used it too to flavour medicines generally.

Today the oil is used as a flavouring agent in particular for confectionery, chewing gum and toiletries eg. toothpaste.

Medicinally, this variety continues to have its uses. Its leaves are a digestive aid and can also be taken to help ease muscle spasms. In addition there are those who believe that it can relieve (let alone cure) hay fever.

It is the birthday flower for 25th February.