

Mentha x piperita

[Synonyms : *Mentha aquatica*, *Mentha dumetorum*, *Mentha nigricans*]

PEPPERMINT is an invasive perennial. Native to Europe it has tiny, lilac-pink or reddish-violet flowers.

It is also known as American mint, *Balšám* (Czech), Blue balsam, Brandy mint, Chocolate mint, *Fefrminc* (Czech), Lamb mint, Lamint, *Máta peprná* (Czech), *Menta piperita* (Italian), *Menthe poivrée* (French), Organ herb, Pennyrile, *Pepparmynta* (Swedish), *Peřřová máta* (Czech), *Pfefferminze* (German), *Piparminttu* (Finnish), *Piperita* (Spanish), Pudding grass, *Věťřová bylina* (Czech), and *Věťřové kořeni* (Czech); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of ‘warmth of feeling’.

Warning – apart from the general warnings on mints, peppermint oil can cause allergic reactions and heartburn, and may also be unsuitable for sufferers from gallbladder or liver diseases. Peppermint tea should not be given to very young children.

Piperita is derived from the genus name *Piper* meaning ‘like plants in that (pepper) genus or tasting hot and sharp’.

First records of this variety (whose parents are water mint, *Mentha aquatica* and common mint, *Mentha spicata*) under its common name would appear to have been made in 1696 when the English naturalist, John Ray (1627-1705), published a description of it.

The world’s crops of peppermint are all derived from English 17th Century hybrids.

North American Cherokee Indians used peppermint as a food flavouring.

For the Iroquois tribe however the plant had supernatural powers as they believed it was able to counter witchcraft.

Peppermint was valued by many North American tribes for its medicinal virtues. Apart from flavouring medicine the plant was also used by the Cherokee to treat stomach upsets, urinary disorders, piles, vomiting and wind. They also gave it as a sedative. In addition they and the Hoh and Quileute tribes also recommended it as a stimulant. The Iroquois and Cherokee Indians both used it for colds and fevers. It was a treatment for pneumonia among Menominee Indians, it was given to adults and children for worms by the Mohican medicine men, and some of the Delaware tribe took it as a tonic.

This mint is used for both medicinal and culinary purposes today. It is used in food eg. ice cream and sauces, and drinks eg. liqueurs, wherever a ‘striking’ mint smell or flavouring is sought after. It provides a commercial ingredient for cosmetics and toiletries eg. toothpastes and mouthwashes. Peppermint is also used by the pharmaceutical industry in ointments, pastilles, proprietary medicines and syrups, and in addition it is used in homoeopathic treatments.. The tobacco industry employs it for curing tobacco leaves as well.