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### *Monarda didyma*

[Synonyms : *Monarda coccinea*, *Monarda kalmiana*, *Monarda oswegoensis*]

**BERGAMOT** is a perennial. Native to north-eastern North America (from Ontario to Georgia) it has scarlet-red flowers.

It is also known as American bee balm, Balm, Bee balm, Bergamot, *Bergamota* (Spanish), *Bergamote* (French), *Bergamotta* (Italian), *Bergamottenbaum* (German), *Blodröd temynta* (Swedish), Blue balm, Fragrant balm, Golden monard, *Goldmelisse* (German), Hare mint, High balm, Horsemint, Indian feathers, Indian plume, Lad's love, Low balm, Monarda, *Monarde* (French), Mountain balm, Mountain mint, Orange bergamot, Oswego, Oswego bee balm, Oswego tea, Red balm, Red bee balm, Red bergamot, Robin run-around, *Röd temynta* (Swedish), Rose balm, Scarlet balm, Scarlet beebalm, Scarlet monarda, Scarlet wild-bergamot, Square stem, Sweet bergamot, Sweet Mary, *Temynta* (Swedish), *Väriminttu* (Finnish), and *Zavinutka podvojná* (Czech); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of 'your whims are quite unbearable'.

The flowers are pollinated by humming birds.

Of all the varieties of bergamot available this one with its strong eau de cologne scent is the most aromatic.

Bergamot should not be confused with the bergamot orange (*Citrus aurantium* subsp. *bergamia*). The scent of bergamot leaves is similar to that of the leaves of latter from which the oils for preparing perfumes, cosmetics, aromatherapy oils and Earl Grey tea are obtained. Memories of this may have led the celebrated Spanish medical botanist, Dr. Monardes to christen this plant (*Monarda didyma*) 'bergamot' and sometimes cause confusion today.

*Didyma* means 'paired, twin or two-fold' with reference to the leaves or stamens.

The North American Oswego Indian tribe, of the Oswego River district near Lake Ontario in the United States where bergamot grew in abundance, made a medicinal tea from an infusion of the leaves for treating colds and flu. This for some authorities led to the name Oswego tea. Other authorities suggest that this name came about when an American Quaker botanist, John Bartram (1699-1777) came across the plant at Fort Oswego in New York State.

Some Indian tribes such as the Cherokee ate the leaves with boiled meat, while others used the plant to make a hair oil.

Its medicinal use by North American tribes may not have been widespread. Apart from the Oswego Indians mentioned earlier, the Cherokee used it to cause sweating and as a sedative, and also turned to it as a treatment for gastrointestinal problems, heart disorders, female problems, measles, fever, fluid retention, colds, headaches, wind and nosebleeds.

Authorities appear to disagree as to when bergamot first arrived in Europe. Some say that after introduction to the plant early European settlers in North America sent seed back to their homelands. Others say that John Tradescant the Younger (1608-1662), who collected plants and shells in Virginia (United States) in 1637 and on his return home succeeded his father as head gardener to Charles I (1600-1649), is said to have introduced it to Europe and mentioned it in his earlier writings in 1630. While still others put forward the view that bergamot did not cross the Atlantic for nearly another 100 years when in 1744

John Bartram sent some seed to the English botanist and naturalist, Peter Collinson (1694-1768).

There may also be some debate among professionals as to whether bergamot is pollinated by humming birds with their fine, long beaks or by appropriately 'equipped' butterflies. Medicinally, the plant was recommended by herbalists for internal use in treating nausea, vomiting, period problems, wind and fluid retention. It was used externally for the treatment of rheumatism and other ailments.