

Monarda fistulosa

[Synonyms : *Monarda menthaefolia*, *Monarda mollis*, *Monarda scabra*]

PURPLE BERGAMOT is a perennial. Native to the eastern North America it has small fragrant, purple to rose-coloured flowers each with protruding stamens.

It is also known as Beebalm, Bergamot, *Goldmelisse* (German), *Heliaka ta pezhuta* (Dakota North American Indian), Horsemint, Lavender wild-bergamot, Lemon mint, *Lila temynta* (Swedish), *Monarda*, Oswego tea, *Pezhe pa* (Omaha and Ponca North American Indian), *Temynta* (Swedish), *Tsusahtu* (Pawnee North American Indian), Wild bergamot, and Wild bergamot beebalm.

Purple bergamot attracts humming birds.

Fistulosa means ‘hollow, pipe-like or a narrow duct or passage’ with reference to the hollow stems.

The Omaha and Ponca North American Indian tribes boiled the flowering top to make a hair oil. The Crow Indians and bachelors in particular in the Dakota tribe wore the plant to scent their clothing and person – and the Kutenai threw leaves on hot rocks to perfume the air in their steam baths.

Other tribes such as the Hopi used the plant as a food flavouring particularly for meat. It was food for the Cherokee tribe, some of the Dakota tribe chewed the leaves when singing and dancing, and the Iroquois used the plant to make a drink. For the Flathead Indians ground leaves provided a meat preservative.

This variety has been used medicinally by American Indians for a very long time. The powdered plant was used by some tribes such as the Flathead, some of the Dakota, the Meskwaki, Chippewa and Cherokee as a cure for colds, and Blackfoot, some of the Dakota and the Flathead Indians applied it to sore eyes. As a body rub (or taken internally) it was used by some of the Chippewa, the Koasati, some of the Dakota, the Flathead, and the Cherokee Indians to treat fever, and rubbed on the head or applied in a poultice it was believed by the Navajo, Cherokee and Chippewa tribes to be a cure for headaches. The leaves and flowers were harvested by the Menominee tribe and some of the Chippewa Indians to treat catarrh, and they were boiled by the Teton Sioux for a remedy for stomach pain. The Winnebago believed that a leaf decoction would heal facial skin eruptions such as pimples. Blackfoot Indians used it to cause vomiting, and they also turned to it for treating swollen neck glands and wounds. It was a remedy for some lung problems in the Crow tribe and the Choctaw Indians believed it was safe to prescribe for children with chest pains. The Flathead took it for pneumonia and influenza, while some of the Dakota tribe, the Blackfoot Indians and the Flathead all used it to treat coughs, and some of the Dakota also chose it as a remedy for whooping-cough. Not only did Cherokee Indians use the plant to cause sweating or as a sedative but they also valued it for treating heart problems, measles, fluid retention, wind and nosebleeds. Some of the Dakota used it for stemming bleeding as well and they also prescribed it as a stimulant. Both the Montana Indian and Cherokee tribes used the plant for treating various female disorders, it was a Kutenai remedy for some kidney problems, the Dakota and Cherokee tribes both chose it to cure bowel complaints, the Choctaw Indians took it as a purgative and some of the Chippewa believed it was safe to give to babies suffering convulsions.

Apart from any other medicinal uses the Flathead also relied upon purple bergamot to ease toothache.

Some authorities declare that purple bergamot was introduced to Britain in 1637, nearly 100 years before its close relative bergamot (*Monarda didyma*), by the famous English gardener, John Tradescant (1608-1662) who in the following year succeeded his father as head gardener to the then English sovereign, Charles I.

Medicinally, herbalists have recommended the plant for internal use to treat fluid retention.