

Ocimum canum

[Synonyms : *Ocimum americanum*, *Ocimum dinteri*, *Ocimum fruticosum*, *Ocimum hispidulum*, *Ocimum micranthum*, *Ocimum simile*, *Ocimum stamineum*, *Ocimum thymoides*]

HOARY BASIL is an annual or perennial. Native to India it has small sweet-scented, white flowers with orange stamens.

It is also known as *Ajaka* (Sanskrit), *Alfavaca do campo* (Portuguese), American basil, Curry leaf, *Ganjam korai* (Tamil), Hairy basil, *Jungli tulsi* (Urdu), *Kala tulsi* (Bengali and Hindi), *Katturamatulasi* (Malayalam), *Kemangi* (Malay), *Kukkatulasi* (Telugu), Mosquito bush, and Partminger.

Canum is derived from Latin *canis* (dog, grey, grizzled) meaning ‘off-white, ash-coloured or very pale grey’.

In India the leaves are used as a culinary flavouring.

Some west African rituals entailed mixing hoary basil leaves with a sacrificed bird before the fowl was eaten. It was also believed that evil spirits would be expelled from a sick room by the fumes from the burning leaves. Today west Africans believe the strongly scented leaves act as a mosquito repellent.

Medicinally, in Sudan (and other neighbouring countries) a paste has been made with the pounded leaves for the treatment of skin diseases, and in west Africa an infusion of the leaves has provided a remedy for fever, dysentery and toothache. While in northern India the leaf juice is sniffed to cure headaches and the Chinese have used the leaves for treating coughs.