

*Origanum vulgare*

[Synonyms : *Micromeria formosana*, *Origanum creticum*, *Origanum dilatatum*, *Origanum normale*, *Origanum puberulum*, *Origanum vulgare* var. *formosanum*, *Origanum vulgare* var. *puberulum*]

**OREGANO** (English, German, Spanish) is a perennial. Native from Europe (including Britain) to central Asia, it has small sweet peppery scented, rose (sometimes pink to whitish) flowers.

It is also known as *Almindelig Merian* (Danish), Bastard marjoram, Common marjoram, Common oregano, Common organ, *Dobromysl obecna* (Czech), *Dost* (German), *Dosta* (Swedish), Englishman's marjoram, Field-marjoram, *Gemeiner Dost* (German), *Gewöhnlicher Dost* (German), Greek oregano, Joy of the mountain, *Konig* (Swedish), *Kungsmynnta* (Swedish), *Mäkimeirami* (Finnish), Marjoram, *Mirzanjosh* (Punjabi, Urdu), Mountain mint, *Mridumaruvamu* (Telugu), Organ, Organy, *Origan* (French), *Origano* (German, Italian), *Origano ordinara* (Esperanto), Origanum, *Origan vulgaire* (French), *Penrhudd* (Welsh), Pot marjoram, *Riegnu* (Maltese), *Sathra* (Hindi), Sweet marjoram, True oregano, *Vildmejram* (Swedish), *Wilder Majoran* (German), Wild marjoram, Winter marjoram, and Wintersweet.

The leaves have a **less** strong peppery taste and aroma than the marjoram species (for example *Origanum majorana*) when grown in Britain ie. cooler climates, and **more** pungency when found in coastal areas of southern Europe where they should be used with care.

Warning – oregano could cause problems for anyone suffering from gallbladder or liver disease.

*Vulgare* means 'common'.

Greek myth tells that Aphrodite created the plant as a symbol of happiness and bridal couples in ancient Greece were crowned with oregano. It was also grown around Greek tombs to provide peace for departed spirits.

When oregano was introduced to western Europe in the Middle Ages its scent was popular. It was used as a strewing herb, as well as a flavouring for food. It was also the source of a dye (one that would have been neither durable nor clear in colour) that, in the countryside was used on wool (purple) and linen (reddish brown). Later its leaves were added to furniture polishes. Oregano was popular for flavouring (and preserving) ale and beer. However in Britain at least the approval would appear to have waned in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century following the two World Wars if the absence by then of the bunches of oregano that were hung up to dry in Kentish cottages in the early 1900s was any indication.

Strangely oregano was only introduced to the United States after World War II when the soldiers who had been fighting in Italy returned home to North America with a taste for the seasoning. Although there now marjoram (*Origanum majorana*) is preferred to oregano, the popularity of oregano increased rapidly in the 25 years immediately after the end of the War witnessed by the demand which increased in that time 6,000 fold.

Cattle are said to reject oregano and horses avoid it, yet it seems that sheep and goats find the plant an acceptable morsel.

Oregano has a name in some regions for repelling ants.

The plant and oil are used extensively today for dental preparations and by the pharmaceutical industry in some cough mixtures. They are also used by the food industry as a flavouring, but their use for perfumery and by the toiletry industry in soaps, appears to have reduced. Medicinally, herbalists in the past have chosen oregano to help counter the effects of drugs such as opium (*Papaver somniferum*) or henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*), and also to treat rabies and convulsions, and to have applied it in external applications on bruises and sprains. It is an ingredient in homoeopathic treatments.