

Perilla frutescens

[Synonyms : *Dentidia nankinensis*, *Melissa cretica*, *Melissa maxima*, *Mentha perilloides*, *Ocimum frutescens*, *Perilla albiflora*, *Perilla arguta*, *Perilla avium*, *Perilla frutescens* var. *japonica*, *Perilla nankinensis*, *Perilla ocimoides*, *Perilla ocymoides*, *Perilla ocymoides* var. *japonica*, *Perilla shimadae*, *Perilla urticaefolia*, *Perilla urticifolia*]

COMMON PERILLA is an annual or perennial. Native from the Himalayas through eastern Asia it has bottle-brush-like spikes of tiny white or pale pinkish-purple flowers.

It is also known as *Aka-shiso* (Japanese), *Ao shiso* (Japanese), *Ban tulsī* (Bengali), Beefsteak mint, Beefsteak plant, *Bhanj ira* (Hindi), *Bladmynta* (Swedish), Chinese basil, *Chinesische Melisse* (German), *Chi-ssu* (Chinese), *Daun shiso* (Indonesian), *Egoma* (Japanese), *Gee so* (Chinese), Green-leaved perilla, Green shiso, *Grünes Shiso* (German), *Hung-sha-yao* (Chinese), *Kínai bazsalikom* (Hungarian), *Kinesisk mynte* (Danish), *Kkaennip namul* (Korean), *La tia to* (Vietnamese), Lettuce-leaf basil, *Nag mon* (Thai), *Nga chien chin* (Lao), *Nga-khi-mon* (Thai), *Periljo duonligna* (Esperanto), Perilla (English, German), Perilla mint, Perilla oil, *Pérille verte sauvage* (French), Perillo, Purple mint, Rattlesnake weed, Red perilla, Red shiso, *Schwarznessel* (German), Shiso (English, Finnish, Japanese, Swedish), *Shiso blad* (Dutch), Shrubby perilla, Summer coleus, *Tia to* (Vietnamese), *Ts'ao-t'ou* (Chinese), *Tsu-shih ts'ao* (Chinese), *Tulkkae* (Korean), *Tu to* (Vietnamese), *Tzu ssu* (Chinese), *Veripeippi* (Finnish), Wild basil, *Wilder Sesam* (German), Wild perilla, Yegoma oil plant, *Yeh-ssu* (Chinese), and *Ye sheng bai su* (Chinese).

The plant which self-pollinates is strongly minty-scented.

Warning - persistent contact with the plant can cause dermatitis. Although benign for pigs or dogs the plant can be poisonous for many animals including cattle, sheep, deer and horses which normally avoid it.

Common perilla has been declared a weed in Illinois and Kentucky in the United States.

The sometimes purple-dotted beneath, green to reddish-brown leaves are distilled to obtain an edible essential oil used for flavouring, and the purple-mottled seeds yield an edible oil (similar to linseed oil, *Linum usitatissimum*).

Frutescens is derived from Latin *frutico* (to shoot out, become bushy).

The common name Beefsteak leaf is said to compare the leaf's colouring with that of raw beef. In Asia the fresh or pickled older leaves (or sprouting plants) are eaten with rice and raw fish, or in salads, stir-fries, soups and pickles (such as pickled ginger or plums), or as a vegetable or garnish. The flower heads provide a condiment and food flavouring, as well as a flavouring in beverages, and they are also added to pickled foods. The Japanese rely on the foliage for a red food colouring – and the seeds are eaten in parts of India, as well as in Japan and Korea. Although in ancient China perilla was a popular vegetable enthusiasm for it today is relatively negligible there.

Apart from a food flavouring perilla is used in the preparation of fragrances by the perfume industry in Asia – but it is of little interest in the West. It is also used as a sweetener in tobacco and a flavouring in dental products..

The seeds are harvested for bird seed and the remains after processing them for their oil have been fed to cattle although these animals would normally avoid the plant itself.

The seed oil (known as Yegoma or Perilla Oil) has been used for waterproofing paper eg. for making umbrellas and has also been used in the manufacture of paints (in the United States it has been mixed with soy bean oil (*Glycine max*) for protective paints), printing inks, lacquers, varnishes and linoleum. It has been used for cooking too and for fuel. The food industry has used the seed oil as a preservative in soy sauce and a general flavouring, as well as an ingredient in the manufacture of a sugar substitute. In the last decades it has begun to attract particular attention as an edible oil because it is believed to contain more polyunsaturates than other known edible vegetable oils.

South-eastern Asian specialists suggest that in that region the plant's vegetable oil is of primary interest and its value as a source of condiment and spice, essential oil and animal feed is a secondary consideration.

It is cultivated widely in parts of eastern Asia, particularly Japan, in India. In south-eastern Europe it is grown as an ornamental plant for its green or bright red foliage.

Common perilla has not escaped the attentions of flower arrangers as it is said to have been a constituent of flower arrangements, pot pourris and tussie-mussies during Victorian times in Britain in the 19th Century.

Records suggest that common perilla may have arrived on the west coast of the United States at the beginning of the 19th Century with Japanese or Korean immigrants. Certainly when some of these Asian-Americans were interned in the 1940s during the 2nd World War the plant accompanied them and began to appear in woodland surrounding their camps in the southern and mid-western states. Today at the beginning of the 21st Century it is only popular as a food with Asians in North America (although it was once an ingredient there in sarsaparilla, *Smilax aristolochiaefolia*) and for the rest of the community it is an ornamental plant.

Common perilla was an ingredient in a potion taken by the North American Rappahannock Indians for treating blood problems.

Medicinally, the leaves, stems and seeds are used in modern Chinese herbal remedies and records suggest that it has long been a traditional potion for easing morning sickness (even though today pregnant women are advised to avoid perilla). Chinese and other Asian herbalists have used the plant for treating malaria, cholera, asthma, indigestion, constipation, hiccups, coughs, colds and snake bites. A recent development springing from research carried out by Japanese, Chinese and Finnish scientists has led to new treatments employing an extract of perilla for such allergies as those caused by pollen and fungus spores and room dust.