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*Satureja hortensis*

[Synonyms : *Calamintha hortensis*, *Satureja laxiflora*, *Satureja montana* subsp. *taurica*,  
*Satureja pachyphylla*, *Satureja postii*]

**SAVORY** is an annual. Native to south-western Asia and the eastern Mediterranean it has small rose, lilac or white flowers.

It is also known as *Ajedrea* (Spanish), Bean herb, *Bohnenkraut* (German), *Erba cerea* (Italian), Garden savory, *Kesäkynteli* (Finnish), *Kyndel* (Swedish), St. Julian's herb, *Santoreggia* (Italian), *Sarriette* (French), *Saturejka zahradní* (Czech), Satyricon, *Savoria* (Italian), *Sommarkyndel* (Swedish), Stone basil, and Summer savory.

Although all the varieties have a similar thyme-like (*Thymus*) pepperiness and similar uses, those named 'winter' are usually coarser, stronger, more pungent and hardier. (The ground savory condiment available in the West is usually this species not that of winter savory (*Satureja montana*) which usually has to be grown domestically.)

A light green essential oil can be extracted.

*Hortensis* means 'of or growing in gardens'.

It was the French who christened the plant Bean herb because of its ability to enhance the flavour of all kinds of beans.

It is probable that savories were cultivated long before the Mediterranean had access to the East Indian spices and in the last century BC the Roman poet, Virgil (70-19 BC) recommended that it be grown near beehives because of its fragrance. The Romans, who used savory particularly in highly spiced sauces and vinegars with which they flavoured food liberally, introduced it to northern Europe – and their descendants eventually began cultivating the plant in Italy from about the 9<sup>th</sup> Century where it was prized as an aphrodisiac.

The famous English playwright, poet and actor/manager, William Shakespeare (1564-1616) must have believed that it would be familiar to his audiences (both as a flavouring and medicine) as he refers to it in *The Winter's Tale*

.....Here's flowers for you;  
Hot lavender, mints, savory, marjoram; .....

At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century the early European settlers who crossed the Atlantic to North America took savoury with them to their new home. It is included in the list of plants introduced to that Continent which was prepared by one of their number, John Josselyn. (Records show that the North American Cherokee Indians came to use the leaves in the form of snuff to ease headaches.)

Today it is predominantly a culinary flavouring plant thus maintaining over 2000 years of history – even though it does have medicinal use, particularly as a digestive aid and a stimulant. This last may well have been why it acquired an earlier name for some as an aphrodisiac. The food industry uses the leaves today on a commercial scale especially in flavouring salami. Essential oil is used by the perfumery and drinks industries, and the toiletry industry employs diluted oil as an ingredient in a treatment for balding heads.

Medicinally, herbalists used the plant in the treatment of catarrh and wind, as a poultice for sciatica, and as a dressing for snake bites and wasp and bee stings. The juice was believed

not only to be able to improve eyesight, but was also used as a significant ingredient in a remedy to counter deafness.