

Tanacetum parthenium

[Synonyms : *Chrysanthemum parthenium*, *Leucanthemum parthenium*, *Matricaria capensis*, *Matricaria eximia*, *Matricaria latifolia*, *Matricaria parthenium*, *Matricaria parthenoides*, *Pyrethrum matricaria*, *Pyrethrum parthenium*]

FEVERFEW is a perennial or sometimes biennial (often grown as an annual). Native from south-eastern Europe to the Caucasus it has small daisy-like, white flowers with a yellow centre.

It is also known as American feverfew, Arsesmart, Bachelors' buttons, Balsam, *Bertram* (German, Swedish), Bothem, Buttons, *Camomilla grande* (Italian), Devil daisy, *Epergoutte* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), *Erba madre* (Italian), Exhibition border, Featherfew, Featherfoil, Febrifuge plant, Feverfew chrysanthemum, Flint weed, Flirtweed, Flirtwort, Giant featherfew, Golden feather, *Grande camomille* (French), Madron, Maids, *Maître* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), *Matram* (Swedish), *Matricale* (Italian), *Mattram* (Swedish), Michaelmas daisy, Midsummer daisy, *Moederkruid* (Dutch), *Mutterkraut* (German), Nosebleed, Pale maids, *Partenio* (Esperanto), Pellitory, *Pied d'Alexandre* (French), *Reunuspäivänkakkara* (Finnish), *Řimbaba obečná* (Czech), Stink daisies, *Vratič řimbaba* (Czech), *Wermod Wen* (Welsh), Whitewort, Wild camomile, and Wild chamomile.

Warning – prolonged intake can cause mouth ulcers. The plant can also cause on occasion a mild pleasantly tranquillising effect. It should not be taken when pregnant as it can stimulate the uterus. It can cause dermatitis for some people.

Parthenium is derived from the genus name *Parthenium* meaning 'like plants in that genus'. In the 17th Century it was used for the first time in commercial cosmetics by Gervaise Markham in the preparation of a skin lotion that was supposed to be able to remove freckles and blemishes. Today however it is not noted for cosmetic advantages – but an essence is used by the perfumery industry.

Feverfew was thought to have moth repellent qualities and the London street sellers of old used to pedal muslin bags of dried leaves for this purpose. The plant also gained a name for purifying the air and for this reason was grown near dwellings in order to ward off disease.

In some countries feverfew has been used to flavour pastries, as well as wine and tea.

At some point it reached North America and some of the Indian tribes included it among the many plants used medicinally. While the Mahuna employed it to treat rheumatism, Cherokee Indians bathed swollen feet in a plant infusion.

Many of feverfew's medicinal qualities may well have been appreciated for centuries, including its ability with regard to soothing headaches which was reported as early at least as the 17th and 18th Centuries. Herbalists also recommended it for the treatment of fever (some directed that it be bound round the wrists), coughs, nervous disorders (including melancholy) and vertigo. It was certainly used for female ailments, as an antidote after the intake of excessive opium and (in the form of a tincture) to ease the pain of insect or vermin bites. An infusion of the flowers has also been viewed as an effective remedy for allaying sensitivity to pain, easing facial aches and earaches, as well

as relieving rheumatic pain. Today occasionally feverfew is used in homoeopathic treatments.

Today feverfew is used for treating headaches, period problems and rheumatism. However it is only following detailed scientific research at the end of the 20th Century (after newspaper reports in Britain in 1978 that a woman had cured severe attacks of migraine by eating a few leaves daily despite the disadvantage of its foul taste) that its value for migraine sufferers has been recognized. That research showed that 70% of them (mainly those who can obtain some relief from warmth around the head) experience reduced intensity or frequency of symptoms with this treatment.