

Thymus capitatus

[Synonyms : *Coridothymus capitatus*, *Satureja capitata*, *Thymbra capitata*]

CONEHEAD THYME is a dwarf evergreen shrub. Native throughout the Mediterranean (apart from France and Corsica) it has a pungent smell and small conical heads of pinky-mauve (rarely white) flowers with prominent stamens.

It is also known as Capitata thyme, Corido thyme, Headed savory, *Mateřidouška hlavatá* (Czech), *Mateřidouškovec vonný* (Czech), Mediterranean thyme, *Saghtar* (Maltese), Spanish oregano, Spanish origanum, and *Thimári* (Greek).

The flowers are pollinated by bees, flies, butterflies and moths.

An essential oil often referred to as Spanish oregano oil' or Israeli oregano oil is obtained from this plant (especially the leaves).

Warning – its essential oil is considered unsuitable for use in aromatherapy.

Capitatus is derived from Latin *capito* (man with a large head) meaning 'having a dense head'.

The dried leaves can be brewed to make an aromatic tea – and they can be eaten raw in salads or added to cooked foods as a flavouring.

In past times this was one of the plants used for incense in temples and it was also an ingredient chosen for its fragrance by the ancient Egyptians for their mummification process. Today essential oil can be an ingredient in perfumes, soap, toothpastes, mouthwashes and medicine such as cough syrups. It is also used as a flavouring during food and drink processing eg. baked products, ice cream, soft drinks.

In Israel beehives are still moved to sites abounding with the wild shrub in the hill country (particularly when the citrus blossom is over) – as conehead thyme is considered to be one of the most important honey plants in that Country. In Greece it is the source of Hymettus honey and records indicate that when the Greek philosopher Theophrastus (c.372-c.287 BC) was alive it was even being exported from Athens at that time.

Medicinally, authorities note that the essential oil (and to a lesser extent the leaves) has very strong antiseptic, disinfectant and deodorant qualities.