



Lemon Balm

Melissa officinalis



Family Name: Lamiaceae

Common Names: Balm, Bee Balm, Melissa

Description: A hardy perennial and a member of the mint family, which grows in dense clumps to a metre height. It is shallow rooted with creeping rhizomes, which give rise to upright square stems bearing ovate leaves, toothed and crinkled. Small white hooded flowers appear mid-summer. The whole plant releases a delicious lemony scent when bruised.

Parts Used: Leaves, fresh and green rather than dried.

Active Constituents: Essential oil (0.1% volatile) containing citrol, citronellol, geranial, and linalool; bitter principle, flavorous (quercetic, rhamnocitrin), glucosides (apigenin, quercetic, luteolin), phenolic acid, tannins (rosmarinic acid, caffeic and photogenic acid), triterpenes (ursolic acid and lanolin acid).

Actions: Carminative, diaphoretic, antispasmodic, relaxant, mild ant-depressive, mild febrifuge, anti-viral (topically).

Medicinal Uses: Known as the 'Memory Strengtheners', useful for anyone suffering from restlessness, excitability or insomnia. A specific for the 'Busy Mind' or a 'Tired Brain', also used in a cream for cold sores. Has a quietening effect on the nervous system, aids heart function and circulation. Other uses include morning sickness, pregnancy headaches, fever, palpitations, heartburn, indigestion, nausea due to nerves, hyperthyroidism. Commonly used externally in a cream for *Herpes simplex* (cold sores).

Historical Uses: It was held to be sacred to Apollo, the 'god of medicine', and held up as an elixir of life; when Apollo fell in love with Daphne, he is reputed by the poet to have said: 'I suffer from a malady that no *balm* can heal'. The Swiss physician Phillip von Hohenheim (1493-1541) who was professor of surgery at Basel (1526-8) wrote a great deal about medicine, he was noted for his exceptional cures, and he stated clearly that he had achieved remarkable success with Melissa. Taking a simple tea prepared from lemon balm alleviates feverish conditions, colds, cardiac complaints and many other ills. It was drunk in earlier times to make the mind and heart merry, to revive the heart, to help people who sleep too much, and to drive out cares and melancholy.

Note: A safe herb for children. It is a gentle herbal tranquilliser and can be put in their baths. Lemon balm is powerful and gentle in small doses. It has been found that the volatile oil acts on the limbic system, the part of the brain that governs the autonomic functions.