

Common Name: **Lemon Balm**

Genus: *Melissa*

Species: *officinalis*

Family: Labiatae

AKA: Bawme

Historical Uses:



“The Bees do delight in ye herb” (1)

Medical:

“Ye leaves being drank with wine, and also applied are good for the scorpion-smitten, and ye Phalangium-bitten, and ye dog-bitten and ye decoction of them, by way of fomentation for ye same purposes. And it is fitting for women’s insessions for ye moving of ye menstrua and a collution for teeth paines, and a glister for ye dysentericall, and ye leaves being drank with nitre do help those which are stangled of mushrooms, and ye Torminosi.”(2)

“It eases, consumes, and dissolves hardnesses, especially of boils and abscesses, thereby wearing them away. It brings on the menses, cleanses the womb and prepares it for conception, prevents fainting, relieves heart problems, reduces hardness of the spleen and liver, and is helpful in the treatment of dog or scorpion bites. If chewed, it lessens toothache, and when taken with plantain seed and rainwater it controls dysentery. Useful in asthma, pains of the joints, and gout, it also opens obstructions of the brain and removes the anxiety accompanying melancholia and all hot and burning humors.” (3)



“Bawme drunke in wine is good against the bitings of venomous beasts, comforts the heart, and driveth away all melancholy and sadnesse. Common Bawme is good for women which have the strangling of the mother, either being eaten or smelled unto. The juyce thereof glueth together greene wounds, being put into oyle, unguent, or Balme, for that purpose, and maketh it of greater efficacie. The herbe stamped, and infused in Aqua vitae, may be used unto the purposes aforesaid and is a most cordiall liquour against all diseases before spoken of. The later age, together with Arabians and Mauritanians, affirme Balme to be singular good for the heart, and to be a remedie against the infirmities thereof; for *Auicēn* in his booke written of the infirmities of the heart, teacheth that Bawme makes the heart merry and joyfull, and strengtheneth the vitall spirits.” (4)



“*Dioscorides* says that the leaves of balm “being drunk with wine and also applied, are good for the scorpion-smitten and the dog-bitten. Being smeared on they will assuage the pains of the gout.” The *Grete Herball* claims that “meddled with grease” balm is good against all aches. Also, “the wine that mellissa is sooden in is good to keep one from swooning if the cause be cold.” “The dried leaves laid on top of the head will draw out the congestion and leave one light-

headed,” the *Hortus sanitatis* asserts. “The leaves taken with salt and eaten will relieve the difficulty in breathing...and will clear the chest.” It also “helpth conception more.” (5)

The Swiss-born alchemist and physician Paracelsus (1493-1541) selected lemon balm to prepare his elixir vitae, *primum ens melissae*, by which he professed to regenerate the strength of man and render him nearly immortal. (6)

Culinary: The leaves flavor liqueurs, salads, soups, and vinegar and make herbal teas. (7)

Other: The oil is used in perfumery, ointments, and furniture creams. (8)

Folklore/Astrology:

Warm and dry in the second degree, it is under the dominion of Jupiter. Balm was said to promote longevity. It was useful in calling bees back to their hives, causing them to prefer it above all plants. Applied with salt, it removed wens and, if fed to cows, would increase their milk. (9)



Close-up of the flowers

Balm has been used in charms to attract love. It has also been recommended to be placed in one’s bath for the same purpose. (10)

Contemporary Uses:

Parts Used: Whole plant, leaves, oil.

Medicinal: Internally for nervous disorders, indigestion associated with nervous tension, excitability with digestive upsets in children, hyperthyroidism, depression, anxiety, palpitations, and tension headaches. Externally for herpes, sores, gout, insect bites, and as an insect-repellent. Oil is used in aromatherapy to relax and rejuvenate, especially in cases of depression and nervous tension. (11)



Close-up of the leaves

Culinary: Fresh leaves give a lemon flavor to salads, soups, sauces, herb vinegars, game, and fish (especially in Spain), and are an ingredient in *eau de melisse des Carmes* (mellissa cordial), liqueurs such as Benedictine and Chartreuse, and wine cups. Fresh or dried leaves are used to make tea. (12)

Other: Lemon Balm is primarily used in the pursuit of romance. It is an herbe which attracts, and is sometimes made into a charm and worn to bring a lover into one's life. It may also be used as a bathing herbe, some of the delightfully scented leaves scattered over the water, or an infusion poured to mix with the bath. This is also said to attract romance. (13)

Dried leaves are added to potpourris and herb pillows. (14)

Area of Origin: South Europe, West Asia and North Africa

Physical description: Lemon-scented perennial with a 4-angled stem and ovate, toothed leaves, 1 ¼-3in long. Insignificant, pale yellow flowers are produced in axillary clusters in summer. (15)

Plant type: Perennial

Form: Upright

Height: 12-32 inches

Flower color: Pale yellow flowers

Flowering period: Summer

Soil type/requirements: Moist soil

Hardiness zone: USDA zone 4-9

Sun requirements: Sun or partial shade

Propagation: By seed sown *in situ* in autumn or spring (species only); by division or stem cuttings in autumn or spring. (16)

Sources

1. Dioscorides, Bk. 3, 118

2. Ibid

3. Anderson, 192-193
4. Gerard, pg. 692
5. Freeman, 19-20
6. Tucker, pg. 352
7. Anderson, 192-193
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid
10. Beyerl, pg. 62
11. Bown, pg. 275
12. Ibid.
13. Beyerl, pg. 6
14. Bown, pg. 275
15. Ibid
16. Ibid

Illustrations/Images:

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| 1. Fuch's Herbal | 1543 |
| 2. PSUMG | 2013 |
| 3. PSUMG | 2013 |
| 4. PSUMG | 2013 |