



GET CREATIVE WITH

calendula

THE GOLDEN
GARDEN HEALER

Celina Ainsworth, CHT

Whenever anyone asks about a good medicinal herb to grow in the garden, I always suggest calendula (Calendula officinalis), also known as pot marigold. This hardy member of the aster family has won the hearts of gardeners, herbalists, and chefs alike with its showy orange flowers and wide range of medicinal and culinary uses.

I think that the mere sight of a bed of calendula soaking up the sun is healing in its own right. I will always remember my first experience harvesting the sticky flower heads one hot August afternoon, and the satisfaction that resulted after making my first calendula balm.

THE SCIENCE OF HEALING

Various preparations of calendula appear to enhance the proliferation of white blood cells and have demonstrated antibacterial and antifungal activity in vitro (in lab tests). Calendula ointment has also been shown to stimulate the proliferation of epithelial cells. One study showed that calendula extract enhanced the formation of new blood vessels.

In one 14-day study involving 30

human volunteers, calendula gel applied daily to burns and scalds demonstrated a positive healing outcome. In another small trial, calendula mouthwash was successful in treating periodontal inflammation. The extract has also tested positively in clinical trials for the treatment of bed sores, venous circulatory problems, and skin ulcers.

These findings support the traditional use of calendula for healing.

Active constituents include flavonol glycosides, including isoquercitrin and rutin, volatile oils, carotenoid pigments, terpenoids, polysaccharides, and calendulin. Recently, researchers have focused on the faradiol monoesters that appear to be responsible for the herb's anti-inflammatory action.

COMMON AND EASY TO CULTIVATE, CALENDULA IS ONE OF OUR MOST VERSATILE HEALERS.

Therapeutic actions

Anti-inflammatory, wound healer, antibacterial, antiviral, antifungal, lymphatic tonic.

Calendula flowers can be used topically (externally) in the form of a balm, compress, or wash for the treatment of minor cuts, scrapes, acne, inflammations, burns, and fungal infections.

The infusion also makes a soothing eye wash and mouthwash. Other indications include inflamed lymph nodes, ulcers, eczema, and hemorrhoids.

Infusion (mild topical wash)

One tsp of the herb (5 mL) per cup (250 mL) of boiled water. Allow to steep for 10 minutes, then strain and cool. Apply three times per day.

Stronger topical wash

Directions: Make a strong tea using 4 tsp (20 mL) of calendula per cup (250 mL) of just-boiled water. Steep covered for one hour. Strain. Wash over the affected part as needed.

Calendula balm

Soak 1/2 cup (125 mL) of calendula flowers in slightly less than 1 cup (225 mL) of warmed olive oil overnight. Strain flowers. Reheat calendula-infused oil on low. Add 25 g each of grated beeswax and cocoa butter and allow to melt. Stir. Pour into clean jars.

Calendula flower garland

The freshly gathered flower heads can be harvested, strung on a thread (like popcorn), and hung to dry. When the flowers are needed, undo the garland at one end and slip the flowers off.

Internal use

Infusions and tinctures can also be used for the systemic treatment of internal infections, inflammation, cysts, ulcers, acne, and fungal infections.



Safety

Calendula is generally considered to be safe for internal and external use. Internal use during pregnancy, however, is not recommended. Caution is advised for individuals who are allergic to plants of the aster family (for example, camomile).

THERE'S A FLOWER IN MY SOUP!

Calendula can be added to homemade broths, soups, and stews. The flowers have long been used to impart a yellow colour to grains, including rice and barley, as well as cheeses, hence the folk name "poor man's saffron." A favourite flower to use in fresh salads and in wild food recipes, calendula petals can be plucked and sprinkled or tossed into salads made with other edible blooms and wild greens. **a**

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