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Thyme

This is Health Matters, continuing our series on medicinal herbs.

Our focus today is thyme, the popular culinary herb used to season poultry stuffing and chicken soup. There are many varieties of thyme. The medicinal variety is known as common thyme or garden thyme, the same variety that is most often used for seasoning.

Medicinal preparations of common thyme are made from the leaves and the flowers. Thyme essential oil also has medicinal applications. Thyme is combined with other herbs to treat ailments that range from bronchitis and sore throat to gastritis and skin disorders. Drinking thyme tea on a regular basis even helps with arthritis.

In the Middle ages thyme was used as a food preservative and an incense. In ancient Egypt, it was a mummification ingredient, which indicates its ability to combat decay. Today, thyme's medicinal properties have been proven in the laboratory. Thyme is an ingredient in a large number of home and over-the-counter products. Manufacturers add thyme oil to perfumes, soaps, cosmetics and toothpastes.

Because of its antiseptic properties, thyme is effective in combating bad breath and tooth decay. It is used in mouthwashes like Listerine. Thyme's antiseptic action makes it useful as a skin cleanser as well. It is an ingredient in acne medications. A strong tea made with thyme can be used to cleanse wounds. A strong tea applied to walls prevents mildew. Thyme's anti-parasitic properties make it useful in treating lice, scabies and crabs. Another topical use is as a hair tonic, which is rubbed into the scalp to prevent baldness.

Thyme is a strong anti-microbial, which means it combats bacterial, viral, yeast and fungal infections. It is an effective treatment for athlete's foot. Thyme anti-bacterial, anti-vital properties make it an effective remedy for respiratory ailments. It fights infections, dries mucous membranes, and relaxes bronchial spasms that bring on heavy coughing. Because of its drying ability, thyme tea is helpful as a diuretic. It is useful in treating runny noses caused by colds, hay fever and other allergies. Thyme tea also alleviates watery eyes. It is beneficial in treating sore throats, bronchial ailments, swollen tonsils, laryngitis, sinus, and asthma.

Thyme is especially effective in treating respiratory infections because it loosens and expels mucous. It is even used to treat whooping cough and emphysema. And gargling with thyme tea can reduce swelling and pus formation in tonsillitis. Thyme has been used for centuries to alleviate digestive problems. It helps with colic, stomach ache, diarrhea, upset stomach, and excess gas. It also stimulates the appetite. Thyme dispels parasites such as hookworms and tapeworms.

To make thyme tea, you need one teaspoon of the herb per cup. Combining it with licorice and mint improves the flavor and adds to the tea's medicinal value. Pour hot water over the herb and let it steep for 10 or 15 minutes. The recommended dosage is one cup per day. A stronger tea can be applied topically to soothe and heal muscle spasms and to soothe skin irritations. For skin inflammations and sores, it's best to use thyme as a poultice. A poultice is a cloth saturated with a strong tea or an oil infused with an herb.

Use thyme poultices (POLE-ti-cez) to treat an aching or painful part of the body. Use them on wounds and cuts to reduce inflammation and promote healing. You can also use thyme poultices on the chest to loosen phlegm and stimulate coughing. A different thyme poultice is needed to treat fungus or skin parasites. It is made by mixing four ounces of crushed thyme leaves with fresh vinegar and letting it sit 12 hours or overnight. You can also dilute thyme essential oil with olive oil and apply it directly to the affected area.

Thyme is a valuable herb to add to your home-remedy shelf. And to grow! It's a perennial. Once you plant it, you'll have it for the duration, available year-round in our area to treat a host of ailments. One small plant will spread to a nice clump within a year. Thyme prefers well-drained soils and can be grown from seeds or propagated from stem cutting. Garden centers always have thyme plants. For medicinal use, you'll want to plant common thyme.

Health Matters is a production of KIDE Hoopa CA. Produced and written by Cynthia Poten. Engineered by Joseph Orozco. Our readers were Jay Renzuli and Joseph Orozco. For this audio and more information, visit our download area at www.kidefm.org. Thank you for listening.

Sources and Links

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