

# Materia medica

**Plant Name:** Lemon balm

**Part(s) Used:** leaves and flowers **Energetics:** cooling, drying, but uplifting

**Scientific & other Names:** *Melissa officinale*, balm, Melissa

**Plant Family:** *Laminaceae* (Mint)

**Description:** square stem, opposite leaves, tends to look like ground cover in the spring, then grows to around 2 tall, with white flowers, lemon fragrance. It looks like other mints but bright green and nearly hairless (for instance, catnip is greyish and fuzzy, but has similar shaped leaves)

**Habitat:** gardens usually, but is known to escape

**Region(s) Found:** native to Europe/Asia, but common garden escapee in North America

**Taste(s):** sour, bitter

**Vital or Herbal Actions:** nervine, carminative, digestive stimulant, diaphoretic, febrifuge, antispasmodic, antimicrobial; medical research on antiviral esp for viruses related to the nerves

**Tissues or Organs Affected:** nerves, digestive tract, circulatory system, muscles, skin, wounds

**Used for:** *tissue states* - depression caused by liver stagnation (often with heat), tension, and anxiety; inflammation especially with indigestion, fever, mild pain and tension; *conditions* - commonly used for colds/flu, cold sores, shingles, herpes, high thyroid

**Suggested Methods of Delivery:** hot tea (esp for fever), ice tea, salve or poultice (cold sores/shingles), powder (incense or tea), hydrosol (anxiety/depression), foot soak (tension, anxiety/depression), tincture (liver tension, bitters), garnish in drinks, culinary herb



**Doses:** for fever/illness, 1 pint (16 oz) boiling water to 1 oz lemon balm (dried), otherwise 1 oz herb/32 oz water

**Safety Category:** considered safe for all ages

**Contraindications/Warnings:** There is some concern that lemon balm lowers thyroid or interacts with thyroid medication, but there is no evidence that I know of, the assumption is based on the use of lemon balm to calm a person with high thyroid (which may indirectly lower thyroid but it is not known to cause low thyroid); also, reports that lemon balm improves the effectiveness of mental health medications (which may or may not be a desired effect), but again, these are stories, I have not seen evidence of this. Reports of contact dermatitis (skin reddens when it's touched - some consider this an anti-inflammatory effect).

**Allies:** I can't think of anything it doesn't go well with.

**Adjuncts:** other mints, lemon verbena (for actions), lemon or lemon grass (for flavor or fragrance)

**Antagonists:** caffeine, adrenal stimulants

**Scientific Knowledge (how it might work, chemical constituents, nutrients, etc.):** volatile compounds (essential oils), triterpenoids, phenolic acids and flavonoids (antioxidants)

**Stories (historical information, folklore, anecdotes):** the word balm has roots in describing plants that are healing and aromatic. "Balm makes the heart merry and joyful." Attracts bees. "Aligns heart and mind."

**Emotional, Spiritual, and Ceremonial Uses:** uplifting, outward energy, used in incense and burned in bundles, it is considered a feminine plant governed by the Moon in western astrology, stories of longevity and heart healing are very common.

Carmelite water, an old traditional remedy for nervous palpitations and anxiety, is composed of Lemon Balm, Lemon peel, Angelica root and Nutmeg. Here is a [recipe](#).