

# Herb Folklore

By Sue Adams

## Herbs associated with.....

<u>Love/Romance</u>	<u>Prosperity</u>	<u>Reduce Stress/Help Sleep</u>
Lavender	Chamomile	Lavender
Oregano	Coriander/Cilantro	Lemon Balm
Rosemary	Dill	Rosemary
Sweet Marjoram	Sage	Thyme

<u>Protection</u>
Dill – protection from witchcraft, evil spirits & ghosts
Lavender – protection from evil spirits
Oregano – protection from evil spirits
Parsley – wards off evil spirits

<u>Weight Loss</u>	<u>Immortality</u>	<u>Increase Energy</u>
Fennel	Coriander/Cilantro	Dill

<u>Joy/Good Luck</u>	<u>Memory</u>	<u>Quiet Children</u>
Dill	Rosemary	Dill
Oregano		

### **Catmint:**

It was said that when the root is chewed, the gentlest person would become fierce and quarrelsome. There was a certain hangman who could never screw up his courage to the point of hanging anyone until he had partaken of it.

Also believed was that rats dislike catmint and would not approach it even when driven with hunger.

### **Chamomile:**

Chamomile is one of the oldest known medicinal herbs.

The Egyptians dedicated chamomile to their sun gods because the flower reminded them of the sun. It

was associated with the god Ra for its healing powers and was used as a cure for agu which is a form of malaria. It is believed that chamomile was used in the mummification process for its insect repelling qualities. The Romans also dedicated chamomile to their gods, bathed in it, walked on it and used it medicinally. The Vikings added chamomile to hair shampoos to aid in the lightening of blonde hair.

The fresh plant has a distinct scent of apples, a characteristic noted by the Greeks who named it ground apple (kamai means on the ground) and melon (apple), the origin of the name Chamomile.

In olden days, Chamomile was known as the plant's physician because people thought that by placing chamomile next to a sickly plant, 90% of the time the plant would recover.

Chamomile is supposed to have the magical ability to attract money. Old time gamblers used to wash their hands in chamomile tea before playing cards or throwing dice.

Chamomile tea is an old-fashioned remedy to calm nervousness and was considered a preventative and the sole certain remedy for nightmare.

### **Coriander/Cilantro:**

Ancient Chinese believed that consuming coriander would confer immortality.

Europeans, in the Middle Ages, used coriander as an essential ingredient in love potions.

The practical Romans combined coriander with cumin and vinegar and rubbed it into meat as a conservative.

Coriander has been cultivated and used since ancient times and was employed by Hippocrates and other Greek physicians.

### **Dill:**

Dill originates from the Norse word "dilla" which means to "lull" or "soothe".

Dill seeds are often called "meetinghouse seeds" because they were chewed during long church services to keep members awake or children quiet.

In the Middle Ages, dill was believed to provide protection from witchcraft.

In German and Belgium cultures brides would wear it on their gown or in their bouquets in hopes of happiness and good fortune in their marriage.

To the Greeks the presence of dill was an indication of prosperity.

### **Fennel:**

Fennel history dates back to 23-29 AD, when the Roman author Pliny wrote about it. Pliny believed that serpents ate and rubbed against fennel to improve their eyesight, and because of this observation, he used fennel to treat 22 ailments.

Ancient Greeks called fennel Marathron which is derived from a word meaning "to grow thin." They believed that steeping fennel into a tea would help with weight loss. During the 1300's, in England, fennel was used as an appetite suppressant so that people could observe the Church's mandated

'Fasting dayes'. Fennel was brought by the Puritans to the United States so they could nibble on the seeds during the long Church services to stave off hunger.

During Medieval times, fennel was hung over doorways to protect those dwelling inside from evil spirits. Fennel seeds inserted into keyholes was thought to protect the dwelling from ghosts.

### **Lavender:**

Ancient Egyptians used lavender in their funerary rights, including it in their mummifying process, as well as for perfuming their clothing and themselves. Cleopatra was reputed to have used lavender as one of her secret weapons for seduction (it worked on Julius Ceasar and Mark Antony, evidently).

Arabs were the first to farm lavender; they made use of its ability to ease the nervous system, reduce stress and encourage a good night's sleep. Greeks and Romans used lavender's stress-reducing properties to cure complaints of migraine headaches and insomnia. Lavender wasn't just used by the wealthy – commoners hung lavender above the door to protect against evil spirits and added it to the bath to drive evil spirits and demons from cranky children and to rejuvenate adults.

In Spain and Portugal, lavender was included in bonfires on St. John's Day to help ward off evil spirits. On St. Luke's Day in the 14 and 1500's, young maidens sipped lavender in hopes of they would be granted a dream in which they would see their true love.

### **Lemon Balm:**

Prior to the Middle Ages, lemon balm was steeped in wine to lift one's spirits, help heal wounds, and treat venomous insect bites and stings. During the Middle Ages it was used to reduce stress and anxiety, promote sleep and improve appetite. Today lemon balm is combined with other calming herbs to help promote relaxation.

### **Lemon Verbena:**

Lemon Verbena was traditionally used by Europeans as a diuretic and a gout remedy, to treat inflation of the liver or spleen, and even to aid depression. It was also brewed in a tea as a home remedy to relieve colds and fevers. Lemon verbena is a natural insect repellent.

### **Oregano:**

The name Oregano comes from the Greek meaning "joy of the mountains," mainly due to the abundance of the plant that grows naturally all over the mountains with its many purple flowers.

Ancient Greeks believed that if oregano was growing on a grave, the deceased was happy in the afterlife. Also placing it on a loved ones grave would help bring him joy in the afterlife.

Crowns of oregano were worn by couples on their wedding day to ensure their future joy.

Oregano grown near or in one's home was said to protect it from evil.

Oregano has also been linked to love. In Ancient Greece it is said that when taken as a potion, Aphrodite would come to you in your dreams and reveal your future husband's identity.

Oregano placed under pillows when sleeping was thought to induce psychic dreams.

The essential oil of oregano mixed with olive oil was used to increase hair growth on bald men by rubbing it on their head.

Chinese as well as many other cultures used the herb to alleviate itchy dry skin such as eczema.

### **Parsley:**

Much of the folklore associated with parsley refers to a look alike plant called “fool's parsley” which is *Aethusea cynapium*, a plant native to Europe, Asia and Africa. It is related to hemlock, and like hemlock, is poisonous; hence the unpleasant meanings.

Ancient Greeks believed that parsley sprung from the blood of Archemorus, whose name meant forerunner of death. Victors at funeral games, athletic games held in honor of a deceased person, were crowned with parsley. The saying “to be in need of parsley” meant that someone was very ill and not expected to survive.

Ironically, parsley was worn at Roman weddings to ward off evil spirits.

Greek gardens often had borders of parsley and rue, which led to the saying, “Oh! We are only at the parsley and rue, to signify when an undertaking was in contemplation and not fully acted upon.

Homer tells of chariot horses being fed parsley by warriors before battle in hopes of making the horses more fleet of foot.

In Tudor times, parsley was thought to be a remedy for baldness.

Modern meanings for parsley must be referring to the parsley that we're familiar with, as they're much more pleasant. Parsley means lasting pleasure, festivity to banish misfortune, and useful knowledge.

### **Rosemary:**

Rosemary *officinalis*: In Latin, *ros* means “dew,” and *marinus* “sea” or “Dew or Mist of the Sea. *Officinalis* means that it is official, medicinal, recognized in the pharmacopoeia.

During Victorian Times, the “Language of Flowers” meaning for rosemary was remembrance. This association dates from ancient times when rosemary was recommended as a remedy for forgetfulness. In ancient Greece, it is said that students wore wreaths of rosemary to energize their minds. At some Victorian weddings, a bride would wear a sprig of rosemary to show that she carried with her loving memories of her old home to her new one. In France, the Victorian meaning was “Your presence revives me,” perhaps because the strong, sharp smell seems to stimulate the senses.

During the Middle Ages, rosemary would be grown in several pots, each pot named with a potential lover. The answer would be the plant that grew the fastest and strongest. Poppets (cloth dolls) would be stuffed with rosemary to attract a new lover. Another folklore tidbit - rosemary will repel nightmares and ensure a good night's sleep.

### **Rumex:**

Rumex, also called sorrel and Bloody Dock, was used by the ancient Greeks, Romans and Egyptians for its digestive properties, and it was said to be used a pick me up after a night of revelry. In the Middle Ages sorrel was used to prevent scurvy.

**Sage:**

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it was believed that the condition of a home's sage bush reflected the financial state of the home. If the sage bush was flourishing, finances were also.

During the days of the Roman Empire, women used a strong infusion (tea) of the herb to darken their hair.

**Sweet Marjoram:**

The ancient Greeks believed that Venus (Aphrodite), the goddess of love, created the plants and gave sweet marjoram their wonderful sweet flavor and scent. Both the ancient Greeks and Romans would weave sweet marjoram into garlands that brides and grooms would wear on their heads to symbolize love, honor and happiness. This practice was still common in the United Kingdom during the Middle Ages.

According to ancient folklore, sleeping with a bit of marjoram tucked under your pillow was supposed to promote dreams of true love (your future spouse).

Marjoram was used as a strewing herb on the floors to sweeten the air as it was walked upon. In 17<sup>th</sup> century England, sweet marjoram was an ingredient of snuff. It was also used as a preservative for beer and to give it an aromatic flavor.

**Sweet Woodruff:**

In the Middle Ages, Sweet Woodruff was hung and strewed in churches as a symbol of humility and placed among stored linens to repel moths and other insects. This fragrant herb was also used as a mattress filling and has a long herbal history for use in a variety of ailments to promote healing.

Use Sweet Woodruff in potpourris, sachets and herb pillows. The flowers and leaves can be used for teas and for making garlands and wreaths. Sweet Woodruff is a natural plant dye whose leaves will produce a light brown dye, and the roots a light red when used with alum as a mordant.

**Tarragon:**

Artemisa, tarragon's genus, comes from the Greek goddess Artemis (of the moon), known as Diana by the Romans, who was said to have given tarragon and other artemisias to Chiron, the centaur.

The word tarragon is derived from the Latin *dracunculus*, "a little dragon" Much of the association with dragons comes from the serpentine shade of the herb's roots. It was thought that tarragon would cure the bites and stings of venomous beasts and mad dogs.

**Thyme:**

It was thought that burning thyme in a home would promote good health and that stuffing a pillow with thyme could prevent nightmares. Thyme was also used to communicate with fairy folk and even the dead.