

Yarrow

Family Name: *Compositae*

Latin Name: *Achillea Millefolium*

Common Names: Milfoil

Botanical Description:

Habit: Hardy herbaceous perennial (2:38)

Size: 1-3 feet

Leaves: Fernlike, pinnately divided into many tiny, fine leaflets (1:516).

Flowers: Numerous white, pink or purple flower heads: disc florets surrounded by five ray florets. Flowers in June-September (1:516).

Fruit: Achenes (1:516).

Underground Parts: Root system is useful on slopes for holding earth together (2:38).

Ecology:

Habitat: Roadsides, waste places and fields (1:516)

Range: Europe and has been naturalized in North America

Native Where: Europe

Ecological Relationships: Root secretions will activate the disease resistance of nearby plants. It also intensifies medicinal properties of other herbs (2:38).

Propagation:

Technique: Can be divided or started from seed. Prefers full sun, can tolerate light shade. Needs moderately rich, well drained soil (1:518)

Timing: Spring or fall

Harvest:

Plant Part: Leaves and flowers (2:38)

Season of Harvest: Late summer

Method of Harvest: Cut at ground level, can be used fresh or dried for future use.

Cautions: Yarrow is generally safe, but some people have a topical allergic reaction (rash). This allergy may be cumulative, so it may develop after prolonged use (1:518).

Indigenous and Non-Western Use:

Indigenous Group: At least 46 Native American tribes found a number of ailments that responded to the herb (1:517).

American Indian Uses for Yarrow: abortive, analgesic, bruises and sprains, burns, common cold, cramp in neck, earache, eyewash, headache, hemorrhage, indigestion, kidney and liver aid, laxative, sleep aid, sore throat, spiritual aid, spitting blood, swollen tissue, tea for sickness, toothache, wounds and sores (1:517)

Western Uses/Relationship:

Food: Can be finely chopped and added to salads or soft cheese dips (2:38).

Medicine:

Part Used: Leaves, Flowers

Medicinal Action: Stops bleeding in open wounds: alkaloid
Prevents inflammation and infection: azulene
Antispasmodic: flavanoids
Breaks fevers, pain reduction: salicylic acid
(1:517,518)

Personal Experience:

Medicine:

Part Used: Leaves

Harvest:

Site: Eastside of Olympia, rental home: we had a full lot that was once a garden: completely overgrown when we moved in. My partner dug a 10ft. diameter pit that we used for ritual. I cultivated a garden around it. Several plants were there when we began the project and were selectively left to grow. When we moved 3 years later, we had at least a dozen 3ft. wide, 3ft. tall yarrow plants.

Technique: I occasionally made a leaf infusion for colds. Usually we used fresh crushed leaf on cuts or for nosebleeds.

Experience: Yarrow was the second plant that I had a long term spiritual conversation with. I found that she encouraged me to slow down, listen to my intuition and to open my heart to more fully receive love. The plants in my garden became so huge and healthy. They filled all the space available. I think they were encouraging me to continue my conversation with herbs. As medicine yarrow has been very effective.

Other Notes of Interest: In China the most authentic way to throw the I Ching is to use 50 dried yarrow stalks (1:516)

References Cited:

1. Kowalchik, Claire and William H. Hylton. Rodale's Illustrated encyclopedia of Herbs. Emmaus, Pennsylvania: Rodale Press, 1987.
2. Bremness, Leslie. The Complete Book of Herbs. Viking Studio Books, 1988.