



# Plants For A Future

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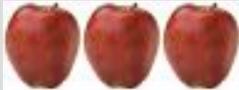
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**Database Name:**

## Melissa officinalis - L.

**Keyword:**

### Lemon Balm

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Author	L.	Botanical references	50, 200
Family	<a href="#">Labiatae</a>	Genus	<a href="#">Melissa</a>
Synonyms			
Known Hazards	None known		
Range	C. and S. Europe, W. Asia and N. Africa. Naturalized in Britain.		
Habitat	Waste places and derelict land near human habitations [9].		
Edibility Rating	 3 (1-5)	Medicinal Rating	 5 (1-5)

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Perennial growing to 0.7m by 0.4m.

### Physical Characteristics

It is hardy to zone 4 and is not frost tender. It is in flower from June to October, and the seeds ripen from August to October. The flowers are hermaphrodite (have both male and female organs) and are pollinated by Bees. It is noted for attracting wildlife.

The plant prefers light (sandy) and medium (loamy) soils and requires well-drained soil. The plant prefers acid, neutral and basic (alkaline) soils. It can grow in semi-shade (light woodland) or no shade. It requires dry or moist soil and can tolerate drought.

### Habitats

Woodland Garden; Sunny Edge; Dappled Shade; Shady Edge;

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Cultivars: (as above except)  
'Variegated'

## Edible Uses

Edible Parts: [Leaves](#).

Edible Uses: [Condiment](#); [Tea](#).

Leaves - raw or cooked. A pleasant lemon-like aroma and flavour, they are used mainly as a flavouring in salads and cooked foods[5, 7, 8, 9, 14, 27, 183]. A lemon-flavoured tea can be made from the fresh or dried leaves[21, 183]. A bunch of the leaves can be added to china tea, much improving the flavour, the leaves are also added to fruit cups etc[4]. They are used as a flavouring in various alcoholic beverages including Chartreuse and Benedictine[238].

## Medicinal Uses

[Antibacterial](#); [Antispasmodic](#); [Antiviral](#); [Aromatherapy](#); [Carminative](#);  
[Diaphoretic](#); [Digestive](#); [Emmenagogue](#); [Febrifuge](#); [Sedative](#); [Tonic](#).

Lemon balm is a commonly grown household remedy with a long tradition as a tonic remedy that raises the spirits and lifts the heart [254]. Modern research has shown that it can help significantly in the treatment of cold sores[254]. The leaves and young flowering shoots are antibacterial, antispasmodic, antiviral, carminative, diaphoretic, digestive, emmenagogue, febrifuge, sedative, and tonic[4, 7, 9, 21, 165, 238]. It also acts to inhibit thyroid activity[238]. An infusion of the leaves is used in the treatment of fevers and colds, indigestion associated with nervous tension, excitability and digestive upsets in children, hyperthyroidism, depression, mild insomnia, headaches etc [4, 9, 238]. Externally, it is used to treat herpes, sores, gout, insect bites and as an insect repellent[238]. The plant can be used fresh or dried, for drying it is harvested just before or just after flowering[9]. The essential oil contains citral and citronella, which act to calm the central nervous system and are strongly antispasmodic[254]. The plant also contains polyphenols, in particular these combat the herpes simplex virus which produces cold sores[254]. The essential oil is used in aromatherapy. Its keyword is 'Female aspects'[210]. It is used to relax and rejuvenate, especially in cases of depression and nervous tension[238].

## Other Uses

[Essential](#); [Pot-pourri](#); [Repellent](#).

The growing plant is said to repel flies and ants[14]. It is also rubbed on the skin as a repellent[238], though the essential oil would be more effective here[K]. An essential oil is obtained from the plant [100] (the exact part is not specified, it is probably the entire plant and especially the flowering stems). It is used medicinally. The whole plant is very pleasantly aromatic, the aroma lasting for a long time

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after the plant has been harvested. It is therefore a very useful ingredient in pot-pourri[4].

## Scented Plants

### Leaves: Crushed

The crushed leaves have a lemon-like aroma.

## Cultivation details

A very easily grown plant, it succeeds in any well-drained soil in a sunny sheltered position[200]. It prefers a light rich moist soil[37, 52], a warm position[27, 37] and partial shade[4]. Once established, this is a drought tolerant species[190, 200], it is a useful plant to try in difficult dry places[187], usually succeeding in the dustiest of soils once it is established[190]. Lemon balm is often grown in the herb garden, and sometimes also commercially[46], there are some named varieties[183]. Plants can often self-sow so freely as to become a menace[187]. If the plants are cut back hard after flowering, they will produce a fresh flush of leaves[238]. Members of this genus are rarely if ever troubled by browsing deer or rabbits [233]. A good bee plant[4, 8, 24]. A good companion plant, especially for brassicas[14].

## Propagation

Seed - sow spring or autumn in a cold frame. Germination can be slow [200]. Prick out the seedlings into individual pots as soon as they are large enough to handle and plant out into their permanent positions when the plants are at least 15cm tall[K]. If there is plenty of seed it can be sown in an outdoor seed bed in April. Plant out into their permanent positions the following spring. Division in spring or autumn [111]. Very easy, larger clumps can be replanted direct into their permanent positions, though it is best to pot up smaller clumps and grow them on in a cold frame until they are rooting well. Plant them out in the spring. Cuttings in July/August.

## Cultivars

### 'All Gold'

The richly scented pubescent leaves keep their bright yellow colouration throughout the growing season, unlike the cultivar 'Variegated'[183]. This property is fully developed when the plant is grown in partial shade[183]. Grows 50cm tall and wide [183].

### 'Lime'

Used in the same ways as lemon balm, but the leaves have a distinct scent of lime[183]. Grows to 90cm tall[183].

### 'Variegated'

The new spring growth has attractive yellow variegations[183].  
This fades when the plant flowers and in the summer heat[183].

## Links

This plant is also mentioned in the following PFAF articles: [The Potted Garden](#).

## References

### [K] **Ken Fern**

Notes from observations, tasting etc at Plants For A Future and on field trips.

[4] **Grieve.** *A Modern Herbal*. Penguin 1984 ISBN 0-14-046-440-9  
Not so modern (1930's?) but lots of information, mainly temperate plants.

[5] **Mabey. R.** *Food for Free*. Collins 1974 ISBN 0-00-219060-5  
Edible wild plants found in Britain. Fairly comprehensive, very few pictures and rather optimistic on the desirability of some of the plants.

[7] **Chiej. R.** *Encyclopaedia of Medicinal Plants*. MacDonald 1984  
ISBN 0-356-10541-5

Covers plants growing in Europe. Also gives other interesting information on the plants. Good photographs.

[8] **Ceres.** *Free for All*. Thorsons Publishers 1977 ISBN 0-7225-0445-4

Edible wild plants in Britain. Small booklet, nothing special.

[9] **Launert. E.** *Edible and Medicinal Plants*. Hamlyn 1981 ISBN 0-600-37216-2

Covers plants in Europe. a drawing of each plant, quite a bit of interesting information.

[14] **Holtom. J. and Hylton. W.** *Complete Guide to Herbs*. Rodale Press 1979 ISBN 0-87857-262-7

A good herbal.

[21] **Lust. J.** *The Herb Book*. Bantam books 1983 ISBN 0-553-23827-2

Lots of information tightly crammed into a fairly small book.

[24] **Baines. C.** *Making a Wildlife Garden*. 0

Fairly good with lots of ideas about creating wildlife areas in the garden.

[27] **Vilmorin. A.** *The Vegetable Garden*. Ten Speed Press 0 ISBN 0-89815-041-8

A reprint of a nineteenth century classic, giving details of vegetable varieties. Not really that informative though.

[37] **Thompson. B.** *The Gardener's Assistant*. Blackie and Son. 1878  
Excellent general but extensive guide to gardening practices in the

19th century. A very good section on fruits and vegetables with many little known species.

[46] **Uphof. J. C. Th.** *Dictionary of Economic Plants*. Weinheim 1959  
An excellent and very comprehensive guide but it only gives very short descriptions of the uses without any details of how to utilize the plants. Not for the casual reader.

[50] ? *Flora Europaea* Cambridge University Press 1964  
An immense work in 6 volumes (including the index). The standard reference flora for Europe, it is very terse though and with very little extra information. Not for the casual reader.

[52] **Larkcom. J.** *Salads all the Year Round*. Hamlyn 1980  
A good and comprehensive guide to temperate salad plants, with full organic details of cultivation.

[100] **Polunin. O.** *Flowers of Europe - A Field Guide*. Oxford University Press 1969 ISBN 0192176218  
An excellent and well illustrated pocket guide for those with very large pockets. Also gives some details on plant uses.

[111] **Sanders. T. W.** *Popular Hardy Perennials*. Collingridge 1926  
A fairly wide range of perennial plants that can be grown in Britain and how to grow them.

[165] **Mills. S. Y.** *The Dictionary of Modern Herbalism*. 0  
An excellent small herbal.

[183] **Facciola. S.** *Cornucopia - A Source Book of Edible Plants*. Kampong Publications 1990 ISBN 0-9628087-0-9  
Excellent. Contains a very wide range of conventional and unconventional food plants (including tropical) and where they can be obtained (mainly N. American nurseries but also research institutes and a lot of other nurseries from around the world).

[187] **Phillips. R. & Rix. M.** *Perennials Volumes 1 and 2*. Pan Books 1991 ISBN 0-330-30936-9  
Photographs of over 3,000 species and cultivars of ornamental plants together with brief cultivation notes, details of habitat etc.

[190] **Chatto. B.** *The Dry Garden*. Dent 1982 ISBN 0460045512  
A good list of drought resistant plants with details on how to grow them.

[200] **Huxley. A.** *The New RHS Dictionary of Gardening*. 1992. MacMillan Press 1992 ISBN 0-333-47494-5  
Excellent and very comprehensive, though it contains a number of silly mistakes. Readable yet also very detailed.

[210] **Westwood. C.** *Aromatherapy - A guide for home use*. Amberwood Publishing Ltd 1993 ISBN 0-9517723-0-9  
An excellent little pocket guide. Very concise.

[233] **Thomas. G. S.** *Perennial Garden Plants* J. M. Dent & Sons, London. 1990 ISBN 0 460 86048 8

A concise guide to a wide range of perennials. Lots of cultivation guides, very little on plant uses.

[238] **Bown. D.** *Encyclopaedia of Herbs and their Uses*. Dorling Kindersley, London. 1995 ISBN 0-7513-020-31

A very well presented and informative book on herbs from around the globe. Plenty in it for both the casual reader and the serious student. Just one main quibble is the silly way of having two separate entries for each plant.

[254] **Chevallier. A.** *The Encyclopedia of Medicinal Plants* Dorling Kindersley. London 1996 ISBN 9-780751-303148

An excellent guide to over 500 of the more well known medicinal herbs from around the world.

## Readers Comments

### Melissa officinalis

**keviadonnell@googlemail.com** Fri Mar 10 2006

A very useful article but I was also wondering where one can purchase such a plant. I used to have one years ago but cannot trace any right now. Can you help at all? I live in London. My e-mail is keviadonnell@googlemail.com Many thanks Kevin

### Melissa officinalis

**Carmen Peralta** Fri May 26 2006

Wow! this is a great article. Can you give me information on how to purchase this plant or seeds. I run a STD News website and I think my readers will appreciate this information.

[STDNews.info](http://STDNews.info) STD News and Articles

### Melissa officinalis

**andre char** Tue Jun 6 2006

If you want to buy the seeds you may try this website in the USA: johnnyseeds.com

### Melissa officinalis

**Peter** Wed Jun 14 2006

Please tell me where I can buy this as a cream, ointment etc in the US. I need help greatly.

## Melissa officinalis

**Anna - Cambridgeshire** Mon Jul 3 2006

I had this plant growing in my back and front garden but didn't know what to do with it. Now I will use it in cooking, salads and try it as tea. I have saved this page, so that I can look back on it if need be - it has been ver useful to me.

## Melissa officinalis

**Heidi in Missouri** Sun Jul 16 2006

I love this plant! I bought mine at Lowes and it grows like crazy. I am planning on making some bath salts with it.

## The Potted Garden

**cynthia** Tue Jul 18 2006

where can i buy this plant???? or, can i even get a picture of it so that i can find it. i would like to purchase one in memory of my niece, Melissa. this is very important to me. thank you. cinder48@hotmail.com

## Melissa officinalis

**walter sepura** Tue Oct 31 2006

where can i buy lemon balm cream or ointment i live in us all i have been able to find is the capsules

## Melissa officinalis

**Dr Virendra Singh** Sat Nov 11 2006

We at IHBT(CSIR), Palampur (HP)India 176061 are growing more than 100 aromatic herbs including Lemon balm, Any one may purchase this gerb from us vsgahlan@gmail.com

## Melissa officinalis

**elle** Mon Nov 27 2006

For those who can't find the plant, just do a websearch on 'melissa officinalis seeds' and you should find some mail order companies to send you some. Grows easily from seed as you will find when you have it in your garden and it self-seeds itself around freely! Seedlings in unwanted places are easily pulled up when young, however and

I've appreciated the way it turns up in some of the difficult to populate dry spots in the garden. Best to cut off the insignificant flowers if you are concerned about self-seeding. I make tea from fresh leaves and it's a pleasant and calming drink, though not as flavoursome as it is scented.

## Melissa officinalis

**elle** Mon Nov 27 2006

Mint lookalike with a strong lemony scent, though not as fabulous-smelling as lemon verbena. Seeds are easy enough to come by via various seed companies on the internet. Self-seeds itself around freely! Seedlings in unwanted places are easily pulled up when young, however and I've appreciated the way it turns up in some of the difficult to populate drier spots in the garden. Best to cut off the insignificant flowers if you are concerned about self-seeding. Reputed to be a bee plant but I haven't noticed them making a 'beeline' for it. However I grow lots of bee plants so they may have found others more appealing. I make tea from fresh leaves and it's a pleasant and calming drink, though not as flavoursome as it is scented.

## Melissa officinalis

**damon rigg** Wed Sep 5 2007

I have found Lemon Balm to be an excellent aid in a good nights sleep.

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