

# Crazy About Chamomile

## Nature's wonder drug

Siegfried Gursche, MH



Chamomile is commercially cultivated in Egypt and Chile, where the climate is right and sunshine is abundant. Many people like to grow chamomile in their gardens as a decorative plant and because everything else around this herb also grows well. You have undoubtedly seen this sweet-smelling wild herb growing profusely in meadows and uncultivated acreage. It grows wild in the most uncommon places—cracks in the roadway, along house and retainer walls, on railway tracks and on walkways where it can be trampled on—practically anywhere as long as it can find a sunny place.

Among the more than 20 different species of chamomile, the three most common ones are the genuine or German chamomile (*Matricaria chamomilla* L.), the wild chamomile (*Anthemis arvensis*) and the Roman chamomile (*Tanacetum parthenium*). The Roman chamomile has medicinal properties while the wild has none. The shining star amongst them is the genuine or German chamomile. It contains a number of medicinally active substances, but mostly azulene, a dark blue healing oil that can only be

found in larger concentrations in chamomile. It is the most precious healing oil known to humans.

### Medical History

The chamomile blossom has been the subject of scientific research for a very long time. Azulene as a botanical medicine was discovered in 1588, yet the medicinal value of chamomile was described in great detail much earlier by the Greek pharmacist Galen (130-199 AD). In the Middle Ages, Hieronymus Bock wrote: "For all mankind there is no more useful herb as medicine than chamomile. It can be used to heal many afflictions."

In my early childhood, chamomile established its popularity in our family through its remedial use in many childhood ailments.

Anyone seriously interested in learning about medicinal herbs will soon discover chamomile. It is such a versatile and effective healer that it demands a special place in any home remedy chest.

Chamomile has earned the reputation of the best healing herb—the "wonder drug" of nature. My personal and professional experience with it goes back more than 50 years. When I was a herbalist apprentice, I gathered fresh chamomile blossoms and dried them to be used as medicinal herb tea.

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My mother brewed chamomile tea using the white/yellow flowers if any of us had complaints such as stomach pains, flatulence with cramps, convulsions, diarrhea or colic. Any inflammation in the mouth and throat or even a bladder infection responded favourably to treatments with the tea.

Every so often, when we had pain in our eyes, my mother would prepare a poultice and place it on the lids. Then we'd cover ourselves with a blanket. Nowadays it's much easier. Simply take two chamomile tea bags, immerse them in hot water for a few seconds, and when they have cooled down a bit, place them on the eyelids. Cover with a folded handkerchief or towel for 10 to 15 minutes. This way also works best with earaches.

It's interesting that the Latin name *matricaria* can be translated as "uterus" because chamomile is an especially good herb for women. It's effective in soothing cramps and relieving painful spasms during menstruation, and it will promote the menstrual flow. It is specially indicated for uterus pains of young mothers at nursing time. For hundreds of years, chamomile has brought effective relief for morning sickness and vomiting. Drunk

before birthing, a cup of chamomile tea can relieve muscle tension and labour pains. Many other little pains during pregnancy and after birth will vanish after drinking a warm cup of tea.

### Winter Wonder

During the cold season, chamomile is indispensable. Steam inhalations with chamomile are very effective to loosen mucus in the nose, throat and sinus, and are helpful for coughs and bronchial catarrhs. Steam inhalations can be carried out easily at home, as they are most effective if done in the morning and before bedtime. Simply make a strong chamomile infusion with about one litre (four cups) of hot but not boiling water, as the volatile oils will evaporate too quickly. Add three to four heaping tablespoons (45 to 60 milligrams) of blossoms or four to six chamomile tea bags to a large bowl. Pour in the water, cover with a towel and let stand for three minutes. Then hold your head over the bowl covered with a towel and inhale the steam deeply.

Recent studies by Dr. Kienholz of Giessen, Germany, have revealed that the toxins released by streptococcus and staphylococcus (the bacteria that cause colds) can be eradicated with chamomile.

This is especially important in the treatment of all infectious diseases of the respiratory organs.

### Value-Added Herb

Tried-and-true herbal medicines are often ignored in favour of new chemical pharmaceuticals. The latter usually come with a long list of precautions and are more expensive because they're market-driven by monetary motives and backed with enormous advertising campaigns. That costs money, and you pay for it. But with herbal products, which cannot be patented, you will not run into this situation.

Herbs are always good value, whether you buy the packaged herb in bulk or filter bags, as a tonic, tincture, salve or in capsules and tablets. According to government regulations, good manufacturing practices must be applied for herbal products just as for any other medicine. This guarantees high quality standards.

Chamomile has no side-effects whatsoever when taken as directed. Chamomile is a healing herb and can be taken for weeks as long as an ailment persists. However, it should not be adopted as a daily beverage that replaces other teas because in the long run, it can have a drying effect on the body. ■

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