

Herb profile

# Herbal sunshine

## Calendula shines bright

Terry Willard, CIH, PhD

Looking at the bright orange-gold hues of the flowers of calendula (*Calendula officinalis*), it is tempting to see them as little bits of sunshine fallen to earth. That's how they were described in the 12th century, when calendula was named "Bride of the Sun," probably because its petals open and close with sunlight.

As an immune tonic and a remedy to dispel vaginal discharge, calendula has long been considered the herb that heals where the sun doesn't shine. But calendula is often employed elsewhere in the body to heal wounds, reduce lymphatic congestion, and to improve the melancholic effects of seasonal affective disorder (SAD).

### A wound healing ointment

As a wound remedy, calendula has been revered for centuries. Used as a tea, or more often an ointment, calendula is an excellent treatment for infected and poorly healing wounds. It has been used on many battlefields as a dressing or compress for bullet wounds. In the 19th century it was a surgeon's remedy of choice to prevent gangrene and tetanus.

Although calendula can work on many types of wounds, it is especially effective for damp wounds, that is, wounds that are tender, swollen, and producing pus. I like to consider calendula for wounds that resemble a cat's

scratch or a wound that has gotten too moist, for example, a wound that has been in wet boots. Just as the sun can dry up puddles, calendula both dries up and disinfects wounds. The wounds can be open or closed, with or without the loss of flesh. Calendula's bacteriostatic and antiseptic effect not only reduces infection but contains the bacteria, keeping the wound clean and allowing the body to cure itself.

Strong yet gentle, calendula is suitable for a range of children's wounds, from diaper rash to skinned knees. Timely use of calendula will prevent the formation of unsightly scar tissue. It has been employed successfully for indolent ulcers, capillary impairment, abscesses, burns, sunburns, and eczema. For conjunctivitis, take five drops of tincture in 30 mL of rose water and wash the eyes. The ointment is also

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useful during breast feeding when baby starts to teethe and nibble.

### A cleansing tea

A tea or soup of calendula will help reduce lymphatic congestion, as calendula reduces lymphatic stagnation and infection. This same tea mixture or the sunny-looking flowers added to soup on a cold, overcast winter day have been brightening people's emotions for centuries. I know when I see a handful of calendula flowers in a winter soup, it brings a sparkle to my eyes.

As an immune tonic, calendula tea not only lifts the emotions related to SAD, but has proven antibacterial and antiviral action and can even reduce the rate of cell mutation. Calendula has been used for centuries to reduce colds and fevers. It enhances macrophage activity (protection against infection) and is an antioxidant against free radicals such as superoxides and hydroxyl radicals.

As a wash, the tea has been effective in reducing vaginitis, endocervicitis,



gonorrhoea, and urethritis. For vaginal discharge, it can be used as both a wash and as a douche. For best results, mix calendula with echinacea (*Echinacea purpurea*) and pau d'arco (*Tabebuia avellanedae*) teas. Calendula tea has been shown to be beneficial in painful menstruation and to relieve pelvic congestion. It works on calming the nervous system, as well as dealing with infection and suppression.

There has been active research on the calendula flower's antiviral action. It has even been shown to reduce HIV replication, exhibiting potent anti-HIV activity in the test tube.

The most active compounds in calendula are its flavonoids and triterpenoid saponins. Other constituents include volatile oils, bitter principles, carotenoids, calendulin, gum, resins, mucilage, and polysaccharides.

There is no toxicity from calendula use with internal or external administration within recommended dosages. However, it is contraindicated for internal use during pregnancy because of its traditional use as an abortifacient.

Typically, both the tea and ointment can be used liberally, two to four times daily. The tincture at a ratio of one to five is usually given in one to three mL doses, two to three times daily.

Try calendula and add a little bit of sunshine to your list of herbal remedies. **a**

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