

Expert Herbal Reality Resource

Chamomile

Names

Botanical Name *Matricaria chamomilla* L

Family: Compositae

Common names: Wild chamomile, matricaria, mayweed, ground apple (Eng), Kamillenblüten, Feldkamille (Ger), fleur de camomile, matricaire (Fr), camomilla (Ital), karpurapushpa (Sanskrit)

Alternate botanical names: *Matricaria recutita* L., *Chamomilla recutita* (L.) Rauschert

Description



A number of plants are called 'chamomile', including the Roman (true or lawn) chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*, *Anthemis nobilis*) and the corn chamomile (*Anthemis arvensis*). Roman chamomile has similar properties, but German chamomile is the most widely used and understood.

German chamomile can grow up to 30cm in height and width. Its leaves are thin, small and deeply cut. The flowers are characteristic white daisy-like, composite flower heads with yellow centres. Chamomile grows best in well-drained soils and will grow naturally around field margins.

Constituents

The main constituents are:

- essential oil (0.3 – 1.5%): up to 50% of sesquiterpenes (-)- α -bisabolol and its oxides A, B and C
- bisabolonoxide A, up to 25% of *cis*- and *trans*-en-yne-dicycloethers (or spiroethers)
- matricin (up to 15%)
- flavonoids (up to 6%), notably apigenin-7-glucoside
- coumarins (herniarin and umbelliferone)
- phenolic acids
- polysaccharides (up to 10%)
- Another active constituent, the blue volatile oil chamazulene, is only generated by steam distillation of matricin. In other words, it will only appear when hot water is added to the flowers; it reaches highest levels when the tea is covered with a saucer or lid so that steam can condense and drop back into the tea.

Traditional use

Widely used for nervous indigestion and diarrhoea, as well as for restlessness and anxiety, especially in children. Also used in steaming applications for nasal congestion and associated upper respiratory problems, and as a mouthwash for dental problems. Chamomile was a popular women's remedy for painful and absent periods.

Traditional actions

In Ayurvedic medicine chamomile has the following characteristics

Rasa (taste) Bitter, pungent, astringent.

Virya (action) Cooling.

Vipaka (post-digestive effect) Pungent.

Guna (quality) Light, dry.

Dosha effect: reduces *pitta* and *kapha* in excess can aggravate *vata*

Dhatu (tissue) Rasa/plasma, rakta/blood, mamsa/muscles, majja/nerve, asthi/bone.

Srotas (channels) Prana/respiratory, anna/digestive, majja/nervous, shukra/ reproductive.



What practitioners say

Nervous system: The anti-spasmodic portions of this herb work on the peripheral nervous system and muscles, which indirectly helps to relax the whole body, creating an overall sense of calm and relaxation. It also is likely to help with sleep.ⁱ It is effective for anxiety, especially when this contributes to indigestion. It may also help with pains associated with the menstrual cycle.^{ii,iii}

Digestive: Chamomile is indicated in digestive spasms, bloating, cramping, indigestion and colic.^{iv} There is evidence that chamomile tea is helpful in blood sugar control, for example in prediabetic and diabetic conditions.

Respiratory: As an inhalation (in steaming hot water) it is indicated in sinusitis, chronic asthma, bronchitis, hay fever and influenza. It will clear excess mucus and phlegm from the lungs in addition to bringing down inflammation and reducing muscular tension, particularly where this may be a result of infection.

Skin: Chamomile's anti-inflammatory and anti-microbial properties are useful in a range of inflammatory skin conditions.^{v,vi} Also useful for wounds,^{vii} burns, nappy rash, bites and stings. Chamomile flowers were traditionally added to children's baths to help relax them before bed but also for soothing childhood eczema.

Other external uses: Mouthwash for ulcers and gingivitis; gargle for sore throats; antiseptic wash for sore inflamed eyes, conjunctivitis; douche for vaginal infections including thrush, or sit in chamomile tea for cystitis, varicose ulcers and haemorrhoids. Dilute oil can also be massaged into painful, arthritic joints,^{viii} migraine,^{ix} trigeminal neuralgia or sciatica and used as insect repellent.



Evidence

In a two-stage clinical trial involving outpatients with moderate-to-severe generalised anxiety disorder, over 50% who initially responded well to chamomile extract 1500mg (500mg capsule 3 times daily) were then divided into continuation therapy or placebo. Over the following 26 weeks those who switched to placebo relapsed more, and their anxiety scores increased.^x

In a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled study, 30 subjects with orthodontic appliances were divided to take a mouthwash containing 1% chamomile extract (comparable to levels achieved in chamomile tea), a placebo, or a standard 0.12% chlorhexidine mouthwash immediately after brushing for 1 minute, in the morning and evening, for 15 days. The placebo group exhibited increases in plaque and gum bleeding. By comparison these

significantly decreased in both the chamomile and the chlorhexidine group. Chamomile also reduced biofilm accumulation and bleeding in patients with gingivitis.^{xi}

In a single-blind, randomized, controlled clinical trial, 64 male and female subjects with type II diabetes were provided with either chamomile tea (3 g/150 mL hot water) 3 times per day immediately after meals for 8 weeks or water (32 subjects in each group). Chamomile tea significantly decreased measures of blood sugar and insulin resistance, insulin levels, and increased measures of antioxidant capacity compared with the control group.^{xii}

Safety

Rare allergic reactions are reported to chamomile, these are mostly when the chamomile is adulterated with related flowers.

Dosage

3 g of the flowers as a tea, three to four times daily

References

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