

# Expert Herbal Reality Resource

## Marshmallow

### Names

**Botanical Name** *Althaea officinalis* L

**Family:** Malvaceae

**Common names:** Mäusespeck (Ger), guimauve (Fr), malvisco (Sp), vartulapushpa (Sanskrit)



### Description

Marshmallow is native to most of Europe, where it can be found growing in salt marshes and damp meadows, river banks and coastal areas. The plant grows to heights of 1-1.5metres and has characteristically soft and 'velvety' leaves, covered in a thick layer of fine, soft hairs. The flowers are normally a light pink or white in colour. The marshmallow roots produce large volumes of mucilage when they come into contact with liquid.

### Constituents

- **mucilage polysaccharides** (5 - 11%: more in winter)
- flavonoids
- phenols
- coumarin (scopoletin)
- starch
- pectin
- tannins

In addition to their physical properties constituents of the mucilage may interact with a key mucosal enzyme, hyaluronidase.<sup>1</sup>

### Traditional use

Marshmallow root was one of the classic 'demulcent' or 'emollient' remedies in European tradition. One of a number of earliest mucilaginous wound remedies, applied internally to inflammations of the upper digestive system and to dry cough. Its leading role among these remedies was usurped with the discovery of slippery elm bark and aloe juice from the Americas.

Marshmallow was eaten as a delicacy by the Romans and Egyptians and has been used as a food at various times in history when other crops were scarce.

### Traditional actions

Traditional Ayurvedic characteristics are

**Rasa** (taste): Sweet.

**Virya** (energy): Cooling.

**Vipak** (post-digestive effect): Sweet, salty, mildly bitter.

**Guna** (quality): Oily, sticky, heavy.

**Dosha** effect: balances all three dosha.

**Dhatu** (tissue): Rasa/plasma, rakta/ blood, mamsa/muscle, majja/nerve, shukra/reproductive.

**Srota** (channel): Prana/respiratory, mutra/urinary, anna/digestive, majja/ nervous, stanya/lactation.

Marshmallow is seen as a wonderful rasayana for all three doshas. Strengthening and nourishing, soothes high pitta, reduces heat and inflammation in anna and mutravahasrotas; good for pitta type gut problems including diarrhoea and dysentery as well as for vata/pitta colitis, allergic rhinitis and coughs.

**Ama pachana** – clears toxins from the gut.

**Amlapittahara** – relieves hyperacidity.

**Asmarighna** – relieves urinary stones and calculi.

**Balya** – increases strength.

**Brmhana** – nourishing tonic, anabolic.

**Grahi** – reabsorbs fluid from the bowel, curbs diarrhoea.

**Kasasvasahara** – relieves coughs and breathing problems.

**Kusthaghna** – alleviates skin conditions.

**Mutrala** – diuretic.

**Ojas vardhana** – increases ojas.

**Rasayana** – rejuvenative.

**Sara** – eases the passage of stool.

**Stanya** – increases breast milk.

**Sulaprasamana** – relieves pain & spasm in the gut.

**Udaraprasamana** – relieves allergies.

**Vranahara** – heals ulcers.



## What practitioners say

- **Digestive tract:** used in all hot, inflamed, irritated and dry conditions of the digestive mucosa such as hyperacidity, reflux oesophagitis, hiatus hernia, and to relieve gastritis and peptic ulcers.
- **Respiratory:** for irritated and dry conditions of the airways with unproductive and tickly coughs. Marshmallow can help provide long-term relief in lung infections by allowing time for the inflamed and infected mucosa to heal.
- **Urinary:** may help relieve urinary inflammations such as cystitis, urethritis, urinary stones and nephritis.
- **Skin:** applied to inflamed, irritated and dry conditions of the skin such as wounds, burns, scar tissue, ulcers, lumps and swellings. Marshmallow can be applied externally to the skin to provide symptomatic relief and as a drawing agent.

## Evidence

A review of the research literature concluded that in combination with other plant extracts marshmallow could be a good choice for cough, sore throat, and other respiratory ailments.<sup>ii</sup>

Marshmallow was shown to have a minor effect in reducing dry mouth syndrome in a controlled clinical trial.<sup>iii</sup> One review found that using an ointment containing 20 percent marshmallow root extract reduced skin irritation.<sup>iv</sup>

A poultice with *Althaea officinalis* was found to reduce breast engorgement in lactating women in a clinical trial<sup>v</sup>

## Safety

Marshmallow is very safe with no adverse reports recorded.

## Dosage

6–15 g/day of dried leaf or root (extraction is best by infusing in water: the mucilage can withstand temperatures only up to 60°C)

## References

- 
- <sup>i</sup> Sendker J, Böker I, Lengers I, et al (2017) Phytochemical Characterization of Low Molecular Weight Constituents from Marshmallow Roots (*Althaea officinalis*) and Inhibiting Effects of the Aqueous Extract on Human Hyaluronidase-1 *Journal of Natural Products* 80 (2), 290-297
  - <sup>ii</sup> Mahboubi M. (2019) Marsh Mallow (*Althaea officinalis* L.) and Its Potency in the Treatment of Cough. *Complement Med Res.* 1-9
  - <sup>iii</sup> Skrinjar I, Vucicevic Boras V, Bakale I, et al. (2015) Comparison between three different saliva substitutes in patients with hyposalivation. *Clin Oral Investig.* 19(3): 753-757
  - <sup>iv</sup> Dawid-Pač, R. (2013). Medicinal plants used in treatment of inflammatory skin diseases. *Advances in Dermatology and Allergology/Postępy Dermatologii i Alergologii*, 30(3), 170-177.
  - <sup>v</sup> Khosravan S, Mohammadzadeh-Moghadam H, Mohammadzadeh F, et al. (2017) The Effect of Hollyhock (*Althaea officinalis* L) Leaf Compresses Combined With Warm and Cold Compress on Breast Engorgement in Lactating Women: A Randomized Clinical Trial. *J Evid Based Complementary Altern Med.* 22(1): 25-30