

Expert Herbal Reality Resource

Thyme

Names

Botanical Name *Thymus vulgaris* L

Family: Lamiaceae

Common names: Common or garden thyme (Engl), Gartenthymian, Thymianblätter (Ger), thym (Fr), timo (Ital), ajagandha (Sanskrit)

Alternate botanical names: The official medicinal monographs in the British Pharmacopoeia and the European Pharmacopoeia allow the use of whole leaf and flowers of *Thymus zygis* (Spanish thyme) as well as *Thymus vulgaris*.



Description

Thyme is a perennial aromatic bush indigenous to the western Mediterranean and southern Italy. It can grow to heights of 30cm, its leaves are small, narrow and elliptical in shape and are a characteristic deep green colour with a strong aroma. Its flowers are also small, delicate and a pale pink/purple in colour. It is often found clinging in rocky crevices or growing in apparently barren soils.

Constituents

- Essential oil (1.0 to 2.5%) predominantly phenols: thymol and carvacrol and their corresponding monoterpene precursors (p-cymene and gamma-terpinene)
- Carnosol, rosmannols, galdosol and carnosic acid
- Tannins (10%)
- Flavonoids
- Salicylates

Traditional use

Thyme has been a popular calming cough remedy, often used as a cough syrup. Thyme tea, sweetened with honey or sugar, would be prescribed for whooping cough, sore throats and catarrh. Again as a tea it was used as a settle colic and irritable bowel, to treat dyspepsia and to control fever in common colds.

Thyme is used in France for liver disease and there are wider traditions of its use for digestive problems.

Traditional actions

Traditional Ayurvedic characteristics are

Rasa (taste) Bitter, pungent.

Virya (action) Heating.

Vipaka (post-digestive effect) Pungent.

Guna (quality) Light, dry, sharp/ penetrating.

Dosha effect: strengthens *pitta*, and reduces excessive *vata* and *kapha*.

Dhatu (tissue) Rasa/plasma, rakta/blood.

Srotas (channels) Prana/respiratory, anna/digestive, mutra/urinary, artava/ female reproductive, mano/mind.

What practitioners say

Respiratory: Thyme is particularly effective at relieving spasmodic coughing and is also indicated in any respiratory conditions characterised by excess levels of mucus, phlegm or catarrh.

Immune: The thymol component of thyme adds antibiotic, anti-fungal, anti-bacterial and anti-infective properties. In strong solutions or simply chewed as a fresh herb thyme will help fight infection of the gums, throat and larynx.

Digestive: The range of volatile oils, including thymol, also help to relieve digestive spasm acting as a carminative in indigestion. Thyme is a modest bitter, so stimulating upper digestive activities, and it is likely to be a good corrector of the gut environment, useful in cases of enteric infections. All these effects will be augmented by increased digestive secretions.

External: Useful in massage oils and liniments for aching joints, muscular pain, cuts & wounds. Gargle for sore throats, tonsillitis; mouthwash for infected, bleeding gums; douche for thrush and other vaginal infections. Lotion for hair; inhalant for coughs, asthma, colds, catarrh, sinusitis.

Evidence

Most of the clinical trial reports for thyme are when this is combined in blends with other remedies like primrose root and ivy leaf. There are no reliable research studies for the effects of the herb on its own.

Adding thyme to olive oil compared to consuming olive oil alone decreased LDL levels in subjects with high cholesterol levels, This was linked to improved bifidobacterial levels in the gut microbiome.ⁱ

Thyme oil on its own is very antibacterial and completely inhibited bacterial growth at concentrations of less than 2%.ⁱⁱ An important ingredient here is the often overlooked carvacrol which has its own pronounced antiseptic activity.ⁱⁱⁱ Some of this activity is also transferred to decoctions and to some extent infusions, with the resulting aqueous extractions active particularly against gram-positive (*Staphylococcus aureus* and *Staphylococcus epidermidis*) and gram-negative (*Escherichia coli*, *Klebsiella spp.*, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, *Enterococcus aerogenes*, *Proteus vulgaris* and *Enterobacter sakazakii*) bacteria.^{iv} This profile adds to the view that the bacteriostatic value of whole thyme preparations is on the gut microbiome.

Safety

Thyme is very safe. Rare sensitivity reactions are possible with applications of the oil.



Dosage

3 to 12 g/day of dried herb in a tea or equivalent

References

- ⁱ Martín-Peláez S, Mosele JI, Pizarro N, et al. (2017) Effect of virgin olive oil and thyme phenolic compounds on blood lipid profile: implications of human gut microbiota. *Eur J Nutr.* 56(1): 119–131
- ⁱⁱ Mullen KA, Lee AR, Lyman RL, et al. (2014) Short communication: an in vitro assessment of the antibacterial activity of plant-derived oils. *J Dairy Sci.* 97(9): 5587–5591
- ⁱⁱⁱ Sharifi-Rad M, Varoni EM, Iriti M, et al. (2018) Carvacrol and human health: A comprehensive review. *Phytother Res.* 32 (9): 1675–1687
- ^{iv} Martins N, Barros L, Santos-Buelga C, et al. (2015) Decoction, infusion and hydroalcoholic extract of cultivated thyme: antioxidant and antibacterial activities, and phenolic characterisation. *Food Chem.* 167: 131–137