

# Yarrow

*Achillea millefolium*

Family *Asteraceae* – Aster Family

**Achillea:** named for Achilles, who supposedly used plants of the genus to staunch the wounds of his soldiers at the siege of Troy

**millefolium:** with many leaves, or leaf segments, literally "a thousand leaves"

Bloodwort, Carpenter's Weed, Common Yarrow, Devil's Nettle, Devil's Plaything, Herbe Militaris, Knight's Milfoil, Milfoil, Nosebleed, Sanguinary, Soldier's Woundwart, Stauchweed, Thousand-leaf

**Action Continuum:** Tonifying, mildly Stimulating/Sedating

**Character:** taste is astringent and bitter; energetics are cool and dry

**Part(s) used:** dried or fresh flowers and leaves

**Primary Types of Preparations:** fresh flowers in infusion and tincture, fresh leaves topically, dried aerial parts in infusion and tincture

**Herbal Actions:** hemostatic, astringent, anti-inflammatory, antibacterial, vulnerary, peripheral vasodilator, hypotensive, diaphoretic, febrifuge, antithrombotic, smooth muscle antispasmodic, bitter tonic, carminative, expectorant, diuretic, menstrual amphoteric

**Primary Uses:** anti-inflammatory and antispasmodic activity, especially to the GI tract; used for IBS, gastric ulcers with bleeding, mucous colitis, intestinal colic, enteritis, and diarrhea. Used as a styptic for wounds and hemorrhoids; also useful for minor internal bleeding: menorrhagia, hematuria, nosebleeds, hemoptysis. Effective remedy in the early stages of influenza as an expectorant and febrifuge, especially when taken as a hot tea with boneset or elderflower. Used to treat urinary tract and vaginal infections. Digestive tonic for biliary dyskinesia, nervous dyspepsia, impaired fat digestion, and flatulence.

## **Fresh Flower or Leaf Poultice**

Applied topically to stop blood flow in wounds and nosebleeds

## **Fresh Flower or Leaf Infused Oil**

Soothing, healing, and helps to shrink hemorrhoids; can also be made into a salve

## **Fresh Flowers or Dried Flowers and Leaves Tincture**

One dropperful 3 times a day for digestive and circulatory system treatments, 4-6 times a day for 7-10 days for urinary tract and vaginal infections

An alcohol-based tincture mixed 50/50 with water can be used as an insect repellent

## **Fresh Flowers or Dried Flowers and Leaves Infusion**

1 tsp. per cup of boiling water, steep covered 20 minutes, up to three cups a day

**Primary Known Medicinal Constituents:** tannins and salicylic acid (astringent, hemostatic, anti-inflammatory); volatile oils (carminative, febrifuge, expectorant, diuretic, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, antioxidant); flavonoids (smooth muscle antispasmodic, hypotensive, antibacterial); sesquiterpene lactones (anti-inflammatory, digestive bitters, antibacterial); alkaloids (digestive bitters, hemostatic); coumarins (antithrombotic). Yarrow is high in chromium, fat, potassium, riboflavin, selenium, thiamine, tin, and Vitamin C.

**Cautions:** avoid large doses in pregnancy because the herb is an emmenagogue

**Body Systems Affected:** skin, circulatory, digestive, respiratory, urinary, female reproductive

**Status:** native

**Plant:** erect, perennial, 8"-40" tall, aromatic forb

**Flower:** head just under a 1/4" wide with 4-6 (usually 5) short, white to pinkish rays each with 3 teeth, disks white; inflorescence with many heads in a round, flat, dense cluster (corymb-like); blooms July-Oct.

**Fruit:** seed not on fluffy pappus

**Leaf:** finely-feathery cut, lance-shaped in outline, upper stalkless

**Root:** fibrous roots that extend deep into the soil and much-branched rhizomes spreading horizontally.

**Habitat:** sun; moderate moisture to wet; fields, roadsides, disturbed sites

Reports on the use of yarrow in North America may involve *A. millefolium subsp. lanulosa*, which is native to eastern North America and nearly identical in appearance. Plants once described as varieties of subspecies of *A. millefolium* have now been separated into nine separate species in Europe. Hybridization with other species in the genus is common so identification is difficult. For the professional botanist, the only reliable way to separate one genetic entity from another is by determining the number of chromosomes. Genetic differences are also associated with chemical variations in the essential oils. Ornamental cultivars with colorful flowers are not used medicinally.

### Yarrow History and Lore

Fossils of the plant have been found in 60,000-year-old Neanderthal burial sites.

Yarrow grows the world over and is one of the most widely recognized and used herbs among all indigenous peoples.

The popular Chinese oracle, the *I Ching*, was originally cast using dried yarrow stalks. It is said to grow in exceptionally plentiful amounts at the grave of Confucius.

At his birth, Achilles' mother dipped him in a bath of yarrow tea, rendering him almost invulnerable. The heel by which she held him remained untouched by the brew, and it was into Achilles' yarrow-free heel that the fatal arrow struck.

Yarrow was a plant of Venus and often consulted for love divination and was included in wedding bouquets. It has been long associated with magic and protection from evil spirits.

**Resources/References:**

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The Complete Medicinal Herbal, Penelope Ody

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The Book of Herbal Wisdom, Matthew Wood

UW-Stevens Point Freckmann Herbarium <http://wisplants.uwsp.edu>



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