

Yarrow

Achillea millefolium

Asteraceae

production

an erect perennial herb can grow to 3', found throughout the temperate regions of the world; "a widely varied aggregate species. Stem angular, tough. Leaves opposite, dark green, bipinnatifid, about 6-10 cm long, clasping the stem at the base, the segments very narrow, downy, and feathery in appearance. Flowers in terminal, flattened, corymbose cymes, ray florets usually white or pinkish, disc florets cream."¹

"Yarrow is one of the most abundant plants in Germany. Its narrow, delicate bipinnate leaves can be found throughout the country in dry meadows, pastures, and field margins. The plant has small white to reddish flowers that grow in dense clusters."²

fern-like foliage up to 6" long
pinnately divided into tiny, fine leaflets
flowers June through September (c/b longer in more temperate climates)
appearance is typical of compositae
numerous white flower heads composed of disk florets surrounded by five ray florets
upon close examination looks like miniature daisies
grow on broad, terminal, flat-topped clusters
spreads readily from the root grows into a patch which can easily be divided
"Yarrow has a creeping rhizome," according to Bremness, an apt description
there are many other varieties, esp. ornamentals
popular colors are the yellow (which usually has a leaf more like that of tansy) and rose-colored (with the finer type of yarrow leaf)
in the past two decades pastels have become popular

Among the names used in India are rojmari, biranjasif and momadruchopandiga.

In China *Achillea alpina* is the better known but *A. millefolium* is also used.

"The plant has white, pink or purple composite flowers in dense cymes with small capitula. The bracts are imbricate and long, thorn-tipped and taper to a point. There are 5 white female florets. The disc florets are tubular, yellowish-white and androgynous. The fruit is 1.5 to 2 mm long. *Achillea millefolium* are 0.1 to 1.5 m high plants with hardy, horizontal rhizomes, which grow from underground runners. The stem is simple, erect and hairy.



¹ *Potter's New Cyclopaedia*, page 290

² *Herbal Medicine*, 2nd edition, Weiss & Fintelmann, page 114

The leaves are lanceolate and multi-pinnate with short acute tips. The numerous subspecies of the *Achillea millefolium* group are found in various regions. They mainly grow in regions of eastern, southeastern and central Europe, as well as on the southern edge of the Alps from Switzerland to the Balkans."³

For some years I wondered why the rose-coloured yarrows we put in our gardens grew more pale. Some years they were nearly white. In 2004 ce some were once again a deep rose. Blumenthal brought me understanding: "Yarrow is a chemically polymorphic perennial herb from a genus of complex taxonomy, native to Europe, Asia, and North America, now distributed in the temperate zone worldwide. Many species, subspecies, and microspecies have been recognized and named. Yarrow adapts itself to new surroundings and can change its morphology and chemical composition significantly, depending on its environment. New subspecies evolve by polyploidy (changes in chromosome number). The subspecies can be differentiated by their chromosome numbers, determined by microscopic examination."⁴

"The names Yarrow and *Achillea millefolium* have been applied to a complex of barely distinguishable species or sub-species which have evolved by the mechanism of polyploidy (changes in chromosome number). Consequently, the taxonomy is confusing and work reported under '*A. millefolium*' may refer to *A. millefolium* sensu stricto or to any of a number of other species which have been more recently and narrowly defined. *A. millefolium* L. sensu stricto [*A. millefolium* L. ssp. *millefolium*], by far the most widespread species, is hexaploid and the volatile oil contains no chamazulene. However, the tetraploid *A. millefolium* L. ssp. *collina* Becker [*A. collina* Becker] yields considerable chamazulene in the volatile oil."⁵

"Macroscopical Description: Stems Furrowed, usually unbranched, 40 cm or more long, distinctly woolly, pale green, sometimes purplish. **Leaves** Lanceolate, up to about 15 cm long, two to three pinnate with the ultimate segments linear and subulate, pale greyish-green and covered with long white hairs; lower leaves with a short petiole, upper leaves sessile and often with two or three small axillary leaves at the base. **Flowers** Numerous, in dense terminal corymbs about 3-4 cm in diameter, each capitulum about 0.5 cm in diameter with an ovoid involucre composed of two rows of oblong, hairy bracts, each with a dark brown to black scarious margin; five white, pink or reddish ray florets and several white or cream disc florets; achenes 2 mm long, shiny, greyish-brown, slightly curved."⁶

"Microscopical Description: Stem Epidermal cells axially elongated with occasional anomocytic stomata and a faintly striated cuticle; abundant covering and scattered glandular trichomes, the covering trichomes uniseriate, composed of four or five small, more or less isodiametric cells at the base and a much elongated, thick-walled end cell tapering to a point; glandular trichomes of the Compositae type with a short stalk and a head formed of two rows of cells enclosed in a bladder-like membrane; cortex narrow, parenchymatous with several layers of collenchyma in the ridges, numerous vascular bundles, arranged in a ring in transverse section, each with a small group of phloem and a wide cap of thick-walled, lignified pericyclic fibres which, in older stems, join to form a continuous band; xylem groups lignified and composed of small vessels with spiral and annular thickening and numerous fibres; parenchymatous cells of outer pith lignified and pitted, those of the central region unligified and sometimes collapsed in older stems forming a hollow. **Leaf** Isobilateral, with the palisades composed of one to three layers; upper and lower epidermal cells with sinuous anticlinal walls and numerous anomocytic stomata; abundant covering trichomes and scattered glandular trichomes, similar to those on the stem, occur on both epidermises. **Flower** Epidermal cells of bracts, longitudinally elongated, thin-walled, filled with dark brown striated pigment, scattered covering trichomes and occasional stomata; the inner central region composed of elongated cells with lignified and finely pitted walls. Corolla of the ray floret with the epidermis of the ligule composed of wavy-walled

³ *PDR for Herbal Medicines*, 2nd edition, pages 833-834

⁴ *Herbal Medicine, Expanded Commission E*, page 419

⁵ *British Herbal Compendium*, page 227

⁶ *British Herbal Pharmacopoeia*, page 190

cells with rounded papillae; the epidermis of the tubular florets with rectangular cells and a small group of pitted stone cells at the base; cells of the ovary wall longitudinally elongated with a finely striated cuticle; corolla of the disc floret composed of rectangular cells with moderately thickened walls; numerous small cluster crystals of calcium oxalate occur in the corolla tube of both ray and disc florets. Pollen grains spherical, 30-35 µm in diameter, with a spiny exine and three distinct pores."⁷

harvesting

primarily the flower tops are harvested and dried
but whole plant can be used (including stems and leaves)

"The material of commerce comes mostly from southeastern and eastern European countries and the United Kingdom. In Germany, a small amount of yarrow is cultivated. the material used in Ayurvedic medicine grows wild in the Himalayan mountains from Kashmir to Kumaon."⁸

"German pharmacopeial grade yarrow flower must be composed of the dried aerial parts (capitulum with maximum 5% stems) harvested during the flowering period, containing not less than 0.2% (v/m) volatile oils with minimum 0.02% proazulene, calculated as chamazulene on a dry-weight basis. It must have a bitter value of maximum 5000. Botanical identity must be confirmed by thin-layer chromatography (TLC) as well as macroscopic and microscopic examinations. The *Swiss Pharmacopoeia* also requires not less than 0.2% volatile oils, though not more than 10% peduncles of inflorescences. The *British Herbal Pharmacopoeia* requires not less than 15% water soluble extractive, among other quantitative standards and identity tests. Both the *Austrian Pharmacopoeia* and the *French Pharmacopoeia* require >0.3% volatile oil and the characterization of azulenes. According to Bruneton, these requirements can only be fulfilled by the pink flower subspecies (*sudetica*, from mountain areas), or by other species entirely (e.g., *A. collina*), because the official species at best contains only traces of azulenes. The most widespread species (*Achillea millefolium* L. ssp. *millefolium*) is hexaploid and the volatile oil contains no chamazulene."⁹

constituents

constituents can vary even within the same species depending upon the age, season and conditions of the soil
an alkaloid identified in the 1950s proves that yarrow causes blood to clot more quickly

volatile oil called azulene

volatile oil called achillein "said to be identical with aconitic acid"¹⁰

contains some salicylic acid derivatives

thujone which, in sufficient quantity, can induce abortion

Potter's:

volatile oil, containing α- and β-pinenes, borneol, bornyl acetate, camphor, caryophyllene, eugenol, farnesene, myrcene, sabinene, salicylic acid, terpineol, thujone etc. including sesquiterpene lactones. "Many samples contain high concentrations of azulenes, up to about 50%, including chamazulene and guajazulene, and although these are now thought to be absent from true *A. millefolium*, they are present in closely related species which are supplied for this."¹¹

Sesquiterpene lactones; achillin, achillicin, hydroxyachillin, balchanolide, leucodin, millifin, millifolide and others

flavonoids; apigenin, luteolin, quercetin and their glycosides, artemetin, casticin, rutin, and others

Alkaloids and bases; betonicine (= achilleine), stachydrine, achiceine, moschatine, tribonelline and others

⁷ *British Herbal Pharmacopoeia*, pages 190-191

⁸ *Herbal Medicine: Expanded Commission E*, page 419

⁹ *Herbal Medicine: Expanded Commission E*, page 420

¹⁰ *A Modern Herbal*, page 864

¹¹ *Potter's New Cyclopaedia*, page 290

Misc: acetylenes, aldehydes, cyclitols, etc.

PDR:

volatile oil (0.2-1.0%): chief components (rendered through steam distillation) are chamazulene (blue, 6-19%, maximum 40%), camphor (up to 20%), β -pinene (up to 23%), 1,8-cineole (up to 10%), caryophyllene (up to 10%), α -pinene (up to 5%), isoartemisiaketone (up to 8%). The composition depends greatly upon the variety, and the volatile oil of some strains is free of chamazulene

sesquiterpene lactones: mainly guaianolides including, achillicin, 8- α -angeloyloxy-10-epi-artabsin, 2,3-dihydro desacetoxymatricin, α -peroxyachifolide. There are also germacranolides such as millefolidin and 3-oxoguaianolides. Some sesquiterpenes are transformed through steam distillation into chamazulene (proazulenes)

polyynes: including, among others, pontica epoxide

alkamids: including tetradeca-4,6,10,12-tetraene acetyl isobutylamides

flavonoids: including apigenin-7-O-glucoside, luteolin-7-O-glucoside, rutin

betain: including L-stachydrine, L-hydrostachydrine (betonicine)

Huang:

The herb contains 0.6 to 0.85% essential oils and 0.05% of the active principles achillin, betonicine, or achilleine.

Blumenthal:

Yarrow contains 3-4% condensed and hydrolysable tannins; 0.3-1.4% volatile oils, mostly linalool, borneol, camphor, β -caryophyllene, 1,8-cineole, and sesquiterpene lactones composed of guaianolides, mainly achillicin (a proazulene), achillin, leucodin, and germacranolides (dihydroparthenolide, achillifolin, millefin); flavonoids (apigenin, luteolin, isorhamnetin, rutin); amino acids (alanine, histidine, leucine, lysine); fatty acids (linoleic, palmitic, oleic); phenolic acids (caffeic, salicylic); vitamins (ascorbic acid, folic acid); alkaloids and bases (achiceine, achilleine, betaine, choline); alkanes (tricosane); polyacetylenes; saponins, sterols (β -sitosterol); sugars (dextrose, glucose, mannitol, sucrose); and coumarins.

British Herbal Compendium:

Volatile oil, 0.2% to over 1%, of varying composition. Steam-distilled oil from hexaploid subspecies contains predominantly oxygenated monoterpenes, linalool (26%) or camphor (18%) being the major component together with borneol, 1,8-cineole and many other terpenes. By contrast, steam-distilled oil from tetraploid sub-species contains predominantly sesquiterpene hydrocarbons, notably chamazulene (ca. 25%), which imparts a blue colour to the oil, and β -caryophyllene. Among other terpenes found are sabinene, α - and β -pinenes and a trace of thujone.

Sesquiterpene lactones: the guaianolides achillicin (= 8-acetoxyartabsin), considered to be the major prochamazulene, achillin, 2,3-dihydrodesacetoxymatricin and leucon; the germacranolides dihydroparthenolide, achillifolin, millefin and acetylbalchanolide; also the eudesmanolide dihydroreynosin and others.

Flavonoids including apigenin, luteolin, and their 7-O-glucosides, isorhamnetin, rutin, artemetin, casticin and 5-hydroxy-3,6,7,4'-tetramethoxyflavone and others.

Alkaloids and other bases, principally achilleine (= betonicine = L-4-hydroxystachydrine) together with stachydrine, choline, and betaine.

Polyacetylenes: dehydromatricaria ester and ponticaepoxide.

Triterpenes and sterols, including α -amyryn acetate and β -sitosterol.

Phenolic acids including caffeic and salicylic acids.

Coumarins.

Tannins, 3-4%.

Pedersen: (calculated on a zero moisture basis per 100 gm)

aluminum 3.4 mg; calcium 867 mg; chromium 0.25 mg; cobalt 0.31 mg; iron trace; magnesium 192 mg;

manganese 0.50 mg; niacin trace; phosphorus 295 mg; potassium 1,780 mg; riboflavin 0.56 mg; selenium 0.16 mg; silicon 0.45 mg; sodium 8.2 mg; thiamine trace; tin 2.6 mg; Vitamin A trace; Vitamin C 67.2 mg; zinc trace

usage

Contraindications [Commission E]: some are allergic¹² to yarrow and to other compositae; side effects: none known

Brinker offers some comments.¹³

interactions with other drugs: none known

“Federal regulations in the U.S. require that finished food or beverage products containing yarrow be thujone-free, though the constituent is present in only trace amounts. The toxicity concerns cited in Kingsbury ... are not relevant to human consumption patterns.”¹⁴

abortifacient (some Native American tribes)
anodyne
antibacterial
anti-inflammatory¹⁵
antipyretic
antirheumatic
antiscorbutic (Bartram)
antispasmodic
aromatic (mild)
aromatic bitter
astringent
bitter (Bartram)
carminative (Bartram)
choleric
diaphoretic
diuretic
emmenagogue
haemostatic
hypotensive
ophthalmia
spasmolytic
stimulant
sudorific
tonic
urinary antiseptic (Bartram)
uterine stimulant (Botanical Safety Handbook)
vulnerary

¹² “With external use, Wichtl advises immediate cessation of treatment in the event of ‘itching and inflammatory changes in the skin’ for persons prone to allergies to *Asteraceae*, while Leung & Foster contraindicate yarrow for those with such allergies.” - *Botanical Safety Handbook*, page 3

¹³ "1) **pregnancy** due to its emmenagogue and abortifacient effects (empirical) if the essential oil with its thujone component is used

2) **allergic sensitivity** to yarrow or other Asteracea such as arnica, calendula, or chamomile (empirical) based on sesquiterpene lactone content." - *Herb Contraindications*, page 138

¹⁴ *Botanical Safety Handbook*, page 3

¹⁵ "Anti-inflammatory activity was reported in laboratory mice and rats with an aqueous extract of yarrow flower heads. It is possible that its anti-inflammatory and antispasmodic properties are due to its flavonoids content." - *Herbal Medicine: Expanded Commission E*, page 421

“This grows everywhere in dry grasslands, on commons and by the roadside. the leaves are narrow, delicate and doubly divided, the flowers small, white or pink, in quite large umbellate clusters. The herb contains bitters, tannin and 0.1-0.5% of a volatile oil. Steam distillation yields a blue oil very similar in action to that found in chamomile, both having an antiphlogistic effect (counteracting inflammation and fever). In contradistinction to chamomile, however, this does not determine the overall effect of yarrow. This plant is primarily a tonic bitter with additional anti-inflammatory, carminative and spasmolytic properties. Its uses therefore are also different... It is useful for spastic conditions in the small pelvis, the parametrium, and neurovegetative disorders in that region. The combination of active principles found in this plant also makes it useful in the treatment of biliary complaints, though its action here is not as marked as that of [other] plants... Having a predominantly bitter action, it may also be considered for atonic states of the stomach. Yarrow, however, is of only secondary importance for any of these indications. The whole herb is used, mainly as a tea or an extract that is commercially available.”¹⁶

The uses which are documented by Moerman in *Native American Ethnobotany* indicate that yarrow was among the most widely used herbs, running six columns. The entry was so extensive that integrating the information was a challenge.

"Yarrow has been used as medicine by many cultures for hundreds of years. Its English common name is a corruption of the Anglo-Saxon name *gearwe*; the Dutch, *yerw*. The genus name *Achillea* may have been derived from the Achilles of Greek mythology, who was fabled to have had his wounds treated by topical use of the herb. The species name *millifolium* is derived from the many segments of its foliage. The ancient Europeans called it *Herba Militaris*, the military herb - an ointment made from it was used as a vulnerary drug on battle wounds. Yarrow flower was formerly official in the *United States Pharmacopeia*. Today, it is official in the national pharmacopeias of Austria, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Switzerland, and Romania. Additionally, it is listed in the Indian *Ayurvedic Pharmacopoeia* for fevers and wound healing. Its uses in North American aboriginal medicine are well documented. Yarrow tea is used by healers of the Micmac nation as a diaphoretic remedy to treat fevers and colds. The stalks are also pounded into a pulp and applied topically to bruises, sprains, and swellings. Yarrow has been the subject of an ongoing study of herbal drugs used by people of the Micmac and Malecite nations of the Canadian Maritime provinces. The study began with an examination of the observations and writings of early European settlers and missionaries. Modern phytochemical studies, using techniques including nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy and combined gas chromatography-mass spectrometry, have identified a range of phytosterols and triterpenes occurring in yarrow, which may help explain its successful therapeutic applications in Micmac and Malecite medicines. The Abnaki people use yarrow tea as a drug to treat colds, fevers and grippe. People of the Algonquin and Quebec nations use it internally to treat colds and other respiratory disorders. The powder is also used as an analgesic snuff for headaches. yarrow infusions and decoctions are used as gastrointestinal aid by the Cherokee, Gosiute, Iroquois, and Mohegan nations. In Germany, yarrow flower is licensed as a standard medicinal tea. It is also used as a cholagogue component in numerous prepared biliary and/or gastrointestinal medicines. it is also used externally as a sitz bath to treat vegetative pelvipathia. In the United States, yarrow is used as a diaphoretic or febrifuge component of traditional cold and flu/fever compounds marketed as dietary supplement products, often used in combination with echinacea herb, elder flower, ginger rhizome, and peppermint leaf. It is also used as a component of topical styptic preparations. The approved modern therapeutic applications for yarrow flower are supportable based on its long history of use in well established systems of traditional medicine, on phytochemical investigations, and on pharmacological studies in animals."¹⁷

A century ago Ellingwood wrote, "While the profession has used yarrow but little, we find an individual physician occasionally who depends upon it for some very important conditions. Dr. Lakin of England uses it in hematuria. He claims that it is good in all forms of passive hemorrhage, whether of the lungs or of the kidneys, or

¹⁶ *Herbal Medicine*, Weiss, page 92

¹⁷ *Herbal Medicine: Expanded Commission E*, pages 419-420

uterine hemorrhage. Yarrow is advised by Webster in uterine hemorrhage. It is a mild astringent, probably acting also as a tonic. [Six or seven paragraphs list a variety of uses for yarrow.] It was one of the remedies which the ancients used in the healing of wounds..."¹⁸

Yarrow is considered safe to use without any concerns according to *Potter's* but Bremness writes that "overuse can make the skin sensitive to sunlight, and it should be taken in small doses. Avoid during pregnancy."¹⁹ Based upon the Commission E, we consider yarrow a safe herb is taken within the recommended guidelines.

Described as a "mild, slow and stimulating diaphoretic: indicated for the first stage of acute febrile reactions."²⁰ useful remedy for severe colds (widely used in treatment of children's colds), esp. when accompanied by a fever
The Abnaki used it when treating children with colds as a pediatric aid. Yarrow is listed by Moerman as used as a cold remedy by numerous tribal peoples. The Cheyenne used it for colds and also as a cough remedy.

valuable remedy when treating catarrh
helpful in treating fevers especially when perspiration has been difficult to induce
recommended for influenza, respiratory catarrh, may be taken in combination with peppermint and/or elder
Bartram describes yarrow as a "peripheral vasodilator to open-up surface vessels enabling more blood to be circulated ... For temperature reduction in the early stages of fevers, influenza, the common cold. Dry skin and absent perspiration. Measles, chicken pox and feverish children's complaints."²¹

useful in the early stages of measles, pox and similar diseases
In North America, it was used as a febrifuge and/or diaphoretic in the treatment of fevers by a great many tribes. The listings in Moerman are quite extensive. An "infusion of leaves [was] given to babies with any kind of fever" by the Iroquois.²²

can be of considerable value for the digestive system. Priest and Priest recommend taking it cold in order to stimulate the appetite and as a tonic for the organs of the digestive system

Yarrow is approved by the Commission E for "loss of appetite, dyspeptic ailments, such as mild, spastic discomforts of the gastrointestinal tract."²³

the astringent properties provide relief from chronic diarrhea and
dysentery

"Internally, Yarrow is used as *Amarum aromaticum* for loss of appetite and dyspeptic ailments such as mild, spastic discomforts of the gastrointestinal tract, including inflammation, diarrhea, bloating and cramps."²⁴

The Blackfoot used yarrow to treat the pain caused by digestive system problems, either drinking an infusion but also using the infusion externally, which they "rubbed on the body to soothe the pain of gastroenteritis."²⁵ The Cheyenne took an infusion for nausea. Yarrow was a digestive aid for the Cowlitz. The Hesquiat chewed the leaves "for any kind of internal pain."²⁶ The Iroquois used yarrow as a remedy to stop vomiting. On the other hand they made an infusion "taken as an emetic for sunstroke."²⁷

useful for many cases of dyspepsia

has been used as a remedy for diarrhea, biliary colic, dysentery, stomach cramps

¹⁸ *American Materia Medica*, pages 355-356. The entry is too lengthy to include in this monograph. We recommend that Master Herbalist students refer to the actual text and read it thoroughly.

¹⁹ *Herbs: The Visual Guide*, page 136

²⁰ *Herbal Medication*, page 86

²¹ *Encyclopedia of Herbal Medicine*, page 459

²² *Native American Ethnobotany*, pages 42-43

²³ *Commission E Monographs*, page 233

²⁴ *PDR for Herbal Medicines*, first edition, page 605

²⁵ *Native American Ethnobotany*, page 42

²⁶ *Native American Ethnobotany*, page 42

²⁷ *Native American Ethnobotany*, page 42

"The herb has a cholagogue (stimulates the flow of bile) effect due to the guaianolide and germacranolide content. The flavonoid content exerts a spasmolytic effect, while the prozaulene fraction has an anti-edema and anti-inflammatory effect. The effect probably results from the interaction of various structured bonds with the chamazulene and flavonoids. The plant has similar effects to those observed in Chamomile flowers, since some of their components are identical ... [Yarrow] is contained in other cholagogic preparations and biliary tract therapeutic agents. it is also used as an adjuvant in preparations for many other indications such as laxatives, cough treatments, gynecological agents, cardiac agents and preparations for varicose veins."²⁸

Blumenthal, in *Herbal Medicine: Expanded Commission E*, reports that the choleric property has been shown in experiments using animal models.

"The composition of the herb also makes yarrow a useful remedy in biliary tract diseases. Due to the dominant effects of its bitter principles, it can also be used to treat atonic forms of stomach disease. However, yarrow is not as potent as the previously mentioned plants. In our practical experience, we have found that wet, warm liver compresses made with yarrow infusion are quite effective. This is probably mainly due to the mild spasmolytic effect, which helps to alleviate the unpleasant symptoms of bloating in chronic liver diseases. The compresses should preferably be applied around midday because patients with chronic liver disease should always reserve time for a midday rest or nap."²⁹

Highly regarded as an astringent and used "for atonic and relaxed tissues where there is free discharge or passive haemorrhage of bright red blood."³⁰

Priest and Priest recommend it for epistaxis (nosebleed), intestinal haemorrhage and bleeding hemorrhoids was once powdered very fine and snuffed to stop nosebleeding; the hemostatic properties are due to the presence of the alkaloid betonicine

Yarrow's astringent property was well known by many tribes. The Chehalis decocted the leaves to treat bloody diarrhea. The Cherokee considered it an antihemorrhagic, "used for hemorrhages and spitting blood."³¹ The Iroquois infused the entire plant for diarrhea (roots and all). The Iroquois also used the plant for children's diarrhea.

Potter's strongly recommends yarrow for hypertension
"Apigenin is anti-inflammatory, antiplatelet and spasmolytic."³²

"Native Americans used a root decoction to strengthen muscles."³³

In folk medicine yarrow is considered helpful when treating disorders of the kidneys.

Recognized as a useful diuretic. The Delaware and Oklahoma Delaware infused the plant for kidney problems. The Blackfoot took it "to pass the sickness with the urine."³⁴ The Cherokee used it when there was blood in the urine.

Yarrow is also used to treat profuse and protracted menstruation; Priest and Priest recommend it for uterine hemorrhage (in combination with shepherd's purse)

It has been used to treat leucorrhoea and vaginal laxity

Potter's recommends it for amenorrhoea; Bartram for obstructed menstruation

Approved by the Commission E as a sitz bath for treating "painful, cramp-like conditions of psychosomatic

²⁸ *PDR for Herbal Medicines*, 2nd edition, page 834

²⁹ *Herbal Medicine*, 2nd edition, Weiss & Fintelmann, page 114

³⁰ *Herbal Medication*, page 86

³¹ *Native American Ethnobotany*, page 42

³² *Potter's New Cyclopaedia*, page 290

³³ *Herbs: The Visual Guide*, page 136

³⁴ *Native American Ethnobotany*, page 42

origin (in the lower part of the female pelvis)."³⁵

"It is often recommended for treatment of gynecological complaints. Spastic parametropathies, which have aptly been called 'vegetative dystonia of the minor pelvis,' are the main indication for yarrow. Internal use of yarrow in this common female complaint will be discussed in the corresponding chapter."³⁶ "Spastic parametropathy is a primary indication for yarrow... Like chamomile, it has antispasmodic and anti-inflammatory action, but yarrow also has an additional tonic effect due to its bitter principles. In order to achieve adequate treatment results, yarrow must be regularly administered for an extended period of time."³⁷

The Blackfoot recommended an infusion "taken when labor pains started and to ease delivery." Later an "infusion of plant [was] taken to expel the afterbirth."³⁸ Yarrow was used during childbirth by the Clallam.

as an anti-inflammatory has great value; this property is due to the azulenes and salicylic acid of considerable value when treating rheumatism (taken internally)

the astringent properties lend it not only to digestive remedies but also for nonspecific vaginal discharge Bartram recommends it for "haemorrhage of mucous surfaces [and] nosebleed." it is used to tone veins and treat varicose veins

Yarrow was, obviously, known by nearly all tribes in North America. They had a great opportunity over many generations to explore the values of this plant. Many of the uses are not particularly found in traditional European folk medicine but, given what we know of yarrow, are logical and worth noting.

The Iroquois considered it a blood medicine which would purify the blood.

The Algonquin of Quebec used it "for respiratory disorders." It was also used by the Cheyenne. The Cherokee smoked the dried leaves for catarrh. The Cheyenne and Quinalt also used it for tuberculosis.

The Bella Coola made an ointment from a combination of a "poultice of leaves and eulachon (candlefish) grease" which they "applied to the chest and back of children for bronchitis."³⁹

An infusion was used for sore throats by the Blackfoot and Gitksan tribes. Yarrow was also a throat remedy for the Cheyenne.

Yarrow for headaches is a well-established practice. It must be considered worthwhile. The Algonquin in Quebec crushed the dried leaves which were snuffed as a remedy for headaches whereas the Tête-de-Boule made a decoction of both leaf and flower for headache.⁴⁰ Interestingly, the Chippewa decocted the leaves, inhaling the steam for headache. The Chippewa also used it as an inhalant for headache, sprinkling a decoction of leaves "on hot stones," according to Moerman.⁴¹ The Woodlands Cree made a compress for headache. Yarrow was used as an infusion and applied in other ways by many tribes in the treatment of headache. Some peoples, such as the Iroquois, used it both internally and externally.

It was used "for restful sleep" by the Cherokee.⁴²

The Iroquois decocted the plant which was "given and used as a wash for babies with convulsions."⁴³

The Cherokee and Cheyenne used it for chest pains and heart trouble.

The Cherokee used it to treat internal hemorrhage, including spitting blood and blood in the stool.

The Cherokee used it for hemorrhoids, including bleeding piles.

The Iroquois used an infusion as a pediatric anthelmintic.

³⁵ *Commission E Monographs*, page 233

³⁶ *Herbal Medicine*, 2nd edition, Weiss & Fintelmann, page 322

³⁷ *Herbal Medicine*, 2nd edition, Weiss & Fintelmann, page 340

³⁸ *Native American Ethnobotany*, page 42

³⁹ *Native American Ethnobotany*, page 42

⁴⁰ *Native American Ethnobotany*, page 42

⁴¹ *Native American Ethnobotany*, page 42

⁴² *Native American Ethnobotany*, page 42

⁴³ *Native American Ethnobotany*, page 42

Yarrow provided a toothache remedy for the Woodlands Cree, the Creek and others. The Mahuna rolled the leaves tightly to insert into a cavity.

The Quinault decocted the roots which were used as an eyewash.

has some history of use as an eyewash in traditional folk medicine

The Blackfoot used it as an eyewash for horses.

The Chippewa decocted both leaves and stalk, "applied to horses as a stimulant."⁴⁴

dosage: [Bartram] infusion: 1 heaped tsp per cup boiling water infused 10 minutes, one cup thrice daily
[Commission E] 4.5 g yarrow herb daily or 3 g yarrow flowers; for sitz baths 100 g yarrow per 5 gallons of water

externally:

"Externally, it is used as a sitz bath for painful, cramp-like conditions of psychosomatic origin in the lower part of the female pelvis. Yarrow is also used externally as a palliative treatment for disorders and for the healing of wounds. In folk medicine, it is used for bleeding hemorrhoids, for menstrual complaints, and as a bath for the removal of perspiration."⁴⁵

The Blackfoot applied an infusion externally, rubbed upon the stomach, for problems. This was a panacea used for many other body parts as well. The Delaware peoples, however, took an internal infusion for disorders.

"The dried aerial parts of *Achillea millefolium* L. (asteraceae) are used similarly to chamomile. Like chamomile, yarrow contains the anti-inflammatory constituents, including chamazulene. The drug is used externally for its antipruritic activity in skin inflammations. Compresses can be prepared from infusions prepared from 2 g of the drug (1 teaspoon [is approximately] 1.5 g) and 150 ml boiling water or from equivalent doses of hydroalcoholic extracts. A bath additive may be prepared from 100 g yarrow to 20 L water. Commercial semisolid preparations for external use are available in Europe. Hypersensitivity to yarrow and other Asteraceae is contraindicated."⁴⁶

"Yarrows have been prescribed for just about every ailment at one time or another, but certain medicinal uses recur throughout history. And chemical analysis has detected some compounds that might explain, and validate, these applications. For centuries, yarrows have been used on wounds, and in the 1950s an alkaloid from the plant was found to have some ability to make blood clot faster. As far as yarrow's alleged ability to keep wounds from becoming inflamed, a volatile oil called azulene and related compounds have shown anti-inflammatory activity..."⁴⁷

as a vulnerary, helps stop bleeding

Yarrow may be used fresh. The fresh leaves may be used as a styptic, applied to cuts from shaving or mishap. good also for rashes and ulcers

Yarrow was commonly used externally by North American peoples.

The Chippewa decocted the root for 'skin eruptions' and the Crow for boils.

The Algonquin of Quebec made poultices of the leaves. The Blackfoot made poultices of chewed flowers and infusions of the whole plant which they used to treat swellings. The Southern Carrier used it for swellings and sprains.

The Flathead tribe boiled the leaves which they "used for aching backs and legs" in the treatment of

⁴⁴ *Native American Ethnobotany*, page 42

⁴⁵ *PDR for Herbal Medicine*, 2nd edition, page 834

⁴⁶ *Herbal Medicinals*, page 259

⁴⁷ *Rodale's Illustrated Encyclopedia*, page 517

rheumatism.⁴⁸ Other tribes as well applied poultices to painful joints as a remedy against the problems associated with rheumatism.

The Iroquois recognized the analgesic properties and applied the plant as a chewed poultice for neuralgia.

Used by the Cheyenne to treat nosebleed, they crushed leaves and placed them in the nostril.

An infusion was used by the Blackfoot to treat sores. Yarrow was used by many tribes for wounds as well.

The Bella Coola made a hot poultice of pounded leaves which was applied for breast abscesses.

The Bella Coola used it to treat burns, either by chewing the leaves to make a poultice or by making a warm poultice of pounded leaves. The Crow also used the plant for burns as well as open sores. Yarrow was commonly used for wounds by numerous tribes.

The Cowlitz used an infusion as a hair wash. The Okanagan-Colville tribe combined it with "white clematis and witches'-broom branches to make a shampoo."⁴⁹

The eugenol works as a local anaesthetic.

As an astringent, the entire plant may be decocted when treating hemorrhoids

studies

Despite an exceptionally wide range of uses, few pharmacological studies have been published.

Moderate anti-inflammatory activity has been demonstrated in rodents after oral or topical administration and attributed to a protein-carbohydrate complex. Chamazulene and pro-chamazulenes also have anti-inflammatory activity.

The spasmolytic action is attributed to flavonoids; spasmolytic effects of apigenin have been demonstrated. Achilleine has a haemostatic action. The bitter properties are due to the alkaloids and sesquiterpene lactones.⁵⁰

Achillea millefolium

Mars, Venus

Libra

Counter-magick Herbe ... Divinatory Herbe ... Magickal Herbe ... Religious Herbe ... Visionary Herbe

lore

Yarrow's 'ancient history' is not consistent. Some maintain that it was first used by Achilles when healing wounds his soldiers received. Some say that it was a different Achilles, who was a student of Chiron.

A prevalent herbe growing natural in most parts of the world, there is some interesting lore associated with this herbe. Grieve writes that:

It was one of the herbs dedicated to the Evil One, in earlier days, being sometimes known as Devil's Nettle, Devil's Plaything, Bad Man's Plaything, and was used for divination in spells. Yarrow, in the eastern counties, is termed Yarroway, and there is a curious mode of divination with its serrated leaf, with which the inside of the nose is tickled while the following lines are spoken. If the operation causes the nose to bleed, it is a certain omen of success:

'Yarroway, Yarroway, bear a white blow,

If my love love me, my nose will bleed now."

An ounce of Yarrow sewed up in flannel and placed under the pillow before going to bed, having repeated the following words, brought a vision of the future husband or wife:

'Thou pretty herb of Venus' tree,

⁴⁸ *Native American Ethnobotany*, page 42

⁴⁹ *Native American Ethnobotany*, page 43

⁵⁰ *British Herbal Compendium*, page 228

Thy true name it is Yarrow;
 Now who my bosom friend must be,
 Pray tell thou me tomorrow.⁵¹

usage

In the Orkney Islands yarrow is widely used “for dispelling melancholy.” Yarrow is an important herbe when healing someone burdened by troubled emotions, helping cleanse them of an unhealthy sorrow or a depression which has lasted too long. Albertus Magnus uses yarrow in combination with nettles to treat fear and self-negation.

Yarrow’s associations with divination extend far beyond folk spells. In China yarrow stalks are gathered, the straightest collected for scattering when reading the I Ching. It is said that “the most prized yarrow is that which grows upon the burial site of Confucius.”⁵²

Modern lore recommends waiting for the first yarrow bloom and using it to make a wish which should manifest prior to the harvest. The flowers are often included in Rituals of Union and are considered sacred to the Horned God.

invocatory

Horned God

a.k.a.

Bad Man’s Plaything, Bloodwort,
 Carpenter’s Weed, Devil’s Nettle,
 Devil’s Plaything, Milfoil, Nosebleed,
 Old Man’s Pepper, Sanguinary,
 Soldier’s Woundwort, Stauchweed,
 Thousand Weed, Yarroway

addenda

“Thanks to modern, high-tech archaeology, fossils of yarrow pollen have been identified in Neanderthal burial caves, suggesting that its association with the human race is some 60,000 years old ... The most authentic way of casting the I Ching ... involves 50 dried yarrow stalks. And yarrow figured in the Trojan war some 3,000 years ago,



⁵¹ *A Modern Herbal*, page 864, the love divination attributed to Hallowell’s *Popular Rhymes*, etc.

⁵² *The Master Book of Herbalism*, page 255

when Achilles packed it on his comrades' wounds to stop the bleeding. Some botanists say yarrow's scientific generic name, *Achillea*, came from this story. But others attribute the name to the discoverer of the plant, who also happened to be named Achilles...

"According to the British herbalist Maude Grieve, some folks believed you could determine the devotion of a lover by poling a yarrow leaf up your nostril and twitching the leaf while saying, 'Yarroway, Yarroway, bear a white blow; if my love love me, my nose will bleed now.' Other peculiar customs appear in yarrow's long history as a magic herb (which can't really be disentangled from its medicinal history). Yarrow was one of the herbs packed into Saxon amulets. There were amulets for protection from just about everything - blindness, robbers, even the barking of dogs. Witches used yarrows in making incantations, an association that may be the source for the common names devil's nettle, devil's plaything, and bad man's plaything.

"Yarrow was sewn up in flannel and put under the pillow to make the sleeper dream a vision of his or her true love. However, if the sleeper dreamed of cabbages - not so remote a possibility given the yarrow's leafy fragrance - then death or other serious misfortune was about to strike."⁵³

"The seed heads [of the yarrow were] placed on a pan of live coals to produce smoke to keep the witches away."⁵⁴

A. millefolium var. *occidentalis* was part of the Ojibwa's "'kinnikinnick' mixture smoked in medicine lodge ceremonies."⁵⁵ Referring to *A. millefolium*, Moerman writes that the Ojibwa smoked the "florets ... for ceremonial purposes."⁵⁶

The Potawatomi "smudged [the flowers] on live coals to repel evil spirits [and that the] seed heads [were] placed on a pan of live coals to produce smoke to keep the witches away."⁵⁷

"Yarrow has been used to brew beer, as tobacco and in salads and soups. It has been used in witchcraft to cast spells and in Christianity to ward off spells."⁵⁸

According to an article in the Spring 2005 issue of *The Herb Quarterly*, in "the language of herbs," yarrow means "lasting love."⁵⁹

"Achilles, a Homeric hero, treated his injured soldiers with this herb, whence the name *achillea*. The centaur Chiron, who was a physician, and Venus, the goddess of love and plants, recommend the plant to him."⁶⁰

"The Chinese still use dried yarrow stems today as a rod for deciphering the sacred oracle of *I Ching (Book of Changes)*. Slavic popular tradition tells of the custom of plugging a nostril with a yarrow flower and singing:

*Yarrow, by your powerful white breath, tell me how
Much my love may love me, make my nose bleed now!*"⁶¹

"This aromatic Asteraceae is also known as the "eyebrow of Venus" because of its small, finely feathered leaves."⁶²

⁵³ Rodale's *Illustrated Encyclopedia of Herbs*, pages 516-517

⁵⁴ *Native American Ethnobotany*, page 44

⁵⁵ *Native American Ethnobotany*, page 45

⁵⁶ *Native American Ethnobotany*, page 43

⁵⁷ *Native American Ethnobotany*, page 44

⁵⁸ *Nutritional Herbology*, page 175

⁵⁹ "An Herbal Wedding Planner: Magical herbs for matrimony ad romance and a historical touch to the big day" by Barbra Annino, *The Herb Quarterly*, Spring 2005

⁶⁰ *Wild Medicinal Plants*, Schneider, page 258

⁶¹ *Wild Medicinal Plants*, Schneider, page 259

⁶² Müller, Eberling, Claudia; Christian Rättsch, Wolf-Dieter Storl, *Witchcraft Medicine*, page 14

“Yarrow was included in the medicine bundle [for the August Festival or Lammas] along with mugwort, arnica, calendula, and sage. In addition there were such well-known herbs as lovage (*Levisticum officinale*), which was valued as a culinary spice and an aphrodisiac, and dill (*Anethum graveolens*), which was trusted to ward off any ill-willed spirits. Dill’s powerful aroma is probably also the reason the ancient peoples, such as the Scythians, used the herb with other aromatic herbs for the embalming of their dead. Dill, a garden herb brought to central Europe by monks, not only chased off the Buhlteufel but also suppressed fertility (Muller, 1982:77). And a bride who didn’t want to be subjected to her husband’s will could secretly bring mustard and dill seeds to her wedding and murmur, ‘I have you, mustard and dill. Husband, when I speak, you stay still!’”⁶³

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Yarrow⁶⁶

Yarrow is one of the main herbs sacred to midsummer. ..

The scientific name of the genus is *Achillea* and refers to Achilles, the hero of the Trojan War. His mother made him invincible to wounds by holding him in the heavenly fire during the night and healing him again with ambrosia in the morning. Only at his heels, where she held him, did he remain vulnerable. It was in this unprotected spot that the poisonous and deadly arrow of Paris struck Achilles. Following the advice of Aphrodite, the goddess of this pleasant-smelling herb, Achilles placed yarrow on the wound and it healed immediately (Birmann-Dahne, 1996:92).

As a young warrior Achilles, like Asclepius and other great men skilled in the arts of medicine, entered into an apprenticeship with the intelligent horse-man Chiron in order to learn about the wound herbs. Chiron revealed to Achilles the power of yarrow, which the horse-man had used to heal many wounded comrades. The saga suggests that yarrow is truly an excellent wound medicine. This is also indicated by the many common names for the herb: soldier’s woundwort, knight’s milfoil, nose bleed, carpenter’s weed, bloodwort, staunchweed, *Sichelkraut* (sicklewort). In Russia it is called as-blow herb. In France it is known as *herbe militaris* and, in honor of the patron of the carpenters, *herbe a charpentier* or *herbe de Saint-Joseph*. According to religious legend Joseph once gravely injured himself at work. Christ picked some yarrow from the meadow and laid it on him. The wound immediately stopped bleeding and miraculously closed over.

Dioscorides, the ancient Greek “father of phytotherapy,” used the “thousand-leafed soldier’s herb” for puncture wounds and slashes. Hildegard treasured the *Garwe*—Old German for the plant, which can be interpreted as “to make healthy”—for internal and external wounds, to quell the flow of blood and tears, and as a remedy for insomnia. The plant contains tannic acids, which are contracting and astringent, helping to dry the wound and encouraging coagulation. In other words, the tannins neutralize the poisons excreted by the wound bacteria. Yarrow also contains anti-inflammatory volatile oil azulene, which is found in chamomile as well.

Astrologers placed the wound medicines under the dominion of the warlike Mars. But where Mars is found, his

⁶³ Müller, Eberling, Claudia; Christian Rätsch, Wolf-Dieter Storl, *Witchcraft Medicine*, page 16

⁶⁴ Müller, Eberling, Claudia; Christian Rätsch, Wolf-Dieter Storl, *Witchcraft Medicine*, page 14

⁶⁵ Müller, Eberling, Claudia; Christian Rätsch, Wolf-Dieter Storl, *Witchcraft Medicine*, page 16

⁶⁶ Müller, Eberling, Claudia; Christian Rätsch, Wolf-Dieter Storl, *Witchcraft Medicine*, pages 17-19

beloved Venus is never far. Names such as virgin's herb, *herbe de Notre Dame*, Margaret's herb (Saint Margaret was called on for many female illnesses), and the eyebrow of Venus (*supercilium veneris*) are testaments to the role that this medicinal herb plays in woman's health.

Women also used this plant of Venus for oracles. If a girl wished to know what the young man who would marry her and free her from her parents' care looked like, she turned to this herb. For this the yarrow was picked from an unusual place, one where ghosts were found, such as a fork in a path or, better yet, from the grave of a dead man. The girl placed the herb under her pillow and whispered:

*The first yarrow I found there,
In the name of Christ I picked it right,
And as Jesus thought Mary with love,
Let my beloved appear in my dream tonight!*

In the British Isles maidens cut the yarrow at moonlight with a black-handled knife, placed it under their beds before going to sleep, and said:

*Thou pretty herb of Venus' tree,
Thy true name it is Yarrow:
Now who my bosom friend must be,
Pray tell me to-morrow.*

Yarrow oracles such as these are found in many cultures. Rudolf Steiner spoke about the "sulfur action" of this plant, which allows it to channel supernatural and future events. (According to anthroposophists, "The spirit moistens its finger with sulfur in order to work in the physical world.") In China yarrow stalks have been used with the I-Ching for thousands of years. The oracle sticks are thrown in a particular manner, thus creating a "natural connection" between the person seeking advice and the energy of the *feng shui*, which reveals the future events.

Yarrow was a sacred plant to the ancient Germanic peoples. The aromatic herb was generally dedicated to Freya as a medicine and a woman's plant. The tender leaves belonged to the nine green herbs that are eaten in springtime as folk food (the so called green nine). With this soup or little cake consecrated to the Goddess, the humans connected to the greening and rejuvenating nature. Eggs, the symbol of life, were also colorfully decorated. In those days—as is still done today—the eggs were probably wrapped in yarrow leaves and dunked into dye to create delicate patterns.

The use of yarrow leaves in love oracles is also an ancient heathen custom. In order to be sure that a distant boyfriend would stay true, a girl could speak the necessary words, which went something like: "Yarrow, Yarrow, if my beloved is good, neither water nor foam comes, otherwise red blood." She would then turn a yarrow leaf three times around her nose. If she got a bloody nose, her lover was true. The fact that the tips of the feathery leaves had tiny prickles was certainly on the side of the questioner.

Before the Benedictine monks introduced hops, the northern Europeans used yarrow and other bitter aromatic herbs (such as ground ivy, heather, and wild rosemary) for the flavor and preservation of beer. As a brewing herb, yarrow was more sacred to the mighty thunder god Thor, lord of intoxicating drinks, than to fair Freya.

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Image on page 1:

Gerard, John, *The Herbal or General History of Plants*, The Complete 1633 Edition as Revised and Enlarged by Thomas Johnson, © 1975 Dover Publications Inc., NY

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