

2024 Herb of the Year

Yarrow *Achillea millefolium*

Yarrow is best known for its wound healing properties though it has many other gifts. The story of how it got its name comes from Greek mythology. The mother of the Greek warrior Achilles was a sea nymph named Thetis. Thetis wanted to protect her son Achilles so when he was a baby, she picked him up by the heel and dipped him in a vat of Yarrow. The only part of him that didn't get protected by the yarrow was his heel. Hence the term Achilles heel to mean a vulnerable spot, or weak spot. It is clear from mythology that humans have been using Yarrow thru out history.



Yarrow is circumboreal, meaning it can be found around the globe in North America, Europe and Asia. It is a member of the Asteraceae or Composite family. It has a flat umbel of white flowers and blooms from spring to frost in the fall. The leaves are finely cut, feathery and aromatic. It can grow up to 3 ft tall and in poor soils.

Numerous tribes in North America used yarrow for a variety of ailments. The crushed plant was applied to wounds and burns. The leaves were dried for teas to treat colds fevers and headache. It is also used to treat digestive issues such as abdominal pain, flatulence and dysentery. It is considered a diaphoretic and is used to sweat out fevers. It was used to brew beer in the Middle Ages in Europe. In China the plant is considered good luck and the stalks are used for divination in the I Ching, book of changes. It also has a history of being used to dye textiles.

Yarrow contains chemicals that help stop stomach cramps and fight infections. It is commonly used to treat eczema, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and to treat fevers. The various effects may be due the presence of a broad range of secondary active metabolites such as flavonoids, phenolic acids, coumarins, terpenoids (monoterpenes, sesquiterpenes, diterpenes, and triterpenes) and sterols which have frequently been reported in the Achillea species. A more through look at its chemistry can be found here on the National Library Medicine page. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3232110/>

Yarrow's long history of use and safety thru out the world makes it a great addition to your herbal apothecary. It is easy to grow and has been cultivated into many colorful varieties. It is found in fields and roadsides but makes an excellent addition to any garden. It is the wild white or pink varieties that are traditionally used for medicine making while the colored varieties make excellent fresh cut flowers and they hold up well as dried flowers.

