

# Mint Spearmint

## *Mentha spicata*

**Family:** Labiatae (Mint family) includes basil, coleus, catnip, lavender, salvia, thyme. Members of this family have characteristic square stem.

**Native:** Europe

**Hardiness:** Perennial, USDA Zone 4.

**Plant & Specific Variety Info:** If allowed to grow to full height, grows 2' tall. Spreads quickly by underground stems, stolons. Can be invasive. Pale, pinkish purple flowers during mid to late summer.

**Historical & Other Interesting Information:** Legend has it that Persephone became extremely jealous when Pluto fell in love with Minthe. Persephone turned Minthe into a "lowly" plant. Pluto couldn't change Minthe back, but he did change Minthe so that the more Minthe was tread upon, the sweeter she would smell. > The Romans crowned themselves with peppermint wreaths.

**Uses:** **Cooking:** Used in a wide range of food and drinks including tea, mint water, a sprig in lemonade, chopped and added to fresh cooked vegetables, enhances fish, meats, veal, eggplant, beans, fruit salads, makes candy, jellies, etc. **Medicine:** Reputedly used for such common complaints as indigestion, flatulence, and colic. Menthol, the oil in mint, stimulates the flow of bile to the stomach which promotes digestion. It is also an

antispasmodic, used by some to relieve menstrual cramps. A cup of spearmint tea is used for insomnia, leaves and stems of mint can be chewed for bad breath, and chopped hands can be washed with spearmint tea.

**When to Plant:** **Autumn:** Spring, after last chance of frost has passed. Plant as late as 2 months before first fall frost. **Winter:** 6 weeks before last frost.

**Optimal Growing Conditions:** **Soil:** Will grow in any soil. Not necessary to add additional organic material to soil. **Water:** Mints ancestors were aquatic plants; mint will grow in dry or wet spots, but in wet spots, grows MUCH faster (this isn't necessarily good because of its invasive habit). **Exposure:** Full sun or light shade. **Fertilizer:** Not necessary.

**Companion Planting:** Old time gardeners plant mint near members of the cabbage family; it reputedly repels cabbage pests. **Special Growing Instructions:** >Can be invasive. Mint is commonly grown outside in pots stuck in the ground. Also, a 10" deep barrier will prevent roots from spreading. >Can grow inside in bright sunny window or under grow lights.

>Shear back plants during the summer and then again in the fall. Some experts recommend shearing back to ground in late fall.

**Special Sowing & Germination Instructions:**

Easy to grow from seed.

**Harvesting - How & when:** Harvest the young leaves almost anytime during the plants life.

**How to Store:** **Young:** Cut when flower heads are visible but before flowers appear. Tie branches in bundles and hang in warm, dry, dark place. Store in tight jars.

**Freezing:** Clean and dry leaves, place in a plastic bag & press out the air, and freeze. **Drying:** Cut from plant as needed or stick out end of mint branch in cup of water. Replace water frequently.

**Recipes:** **Mint Water:** Crush or bruise 1 cup of spearmint leaves and branches and put in a clean 1/2 gallon container. Fill with cold, clean water. Refrigerate.

**Mint Sleigh Desserts:** Use mint tea and make a plain gelatin according to the directions on the packet. Add chunks of fruit and refrigerate.

### How to Make Herb Teas

To make tea with herbs, use the appropriate dried part of the plant, young leaves in the case of mint. Experiment with the concentrations - start with 1/2 to 1 teaspoon per 8 oz. of water. Pour boiling water over dried herbs. Let steep for 2 minutes before tasting. Adjust the amount of herb to your taste.

### Quality You Can Grow With!

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### Seedling



Date Seed  
Planted:

(Write in date)

**Artist:** Victoria Ekelund of Denver, Colorado loves the whole outdoors and does her best to share that glory in her paintings. She divides her time between raising her family, gardening, and painting.



### Your last day of frost...

The last day of frost (32 degrees or less) is defined as "the first day in spring on which there is less than a 50% chance a frost will occur." This information is crucial when planting a garden. To find out your last day of frost, call your local independent garden center or your **COUNTY** Cooperative Agricultural Extension Service. Also inquire about the average date of the first fall frost.