

Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*)

Article kindly written by Diane June of Hamilton

This plant is also sometimes known as bee balm but is not to be confused with Bergamot (*Monarda didyma*) which can also be known as bee balm.

The plant:

- **The stem** of Lemon balm is hairy, square, branching and light green stem with occasional purple markings. It grows up to 30-50cm tall with the flower stem being up to 8cm long and upright.
- **The leaves** are lemon-scented, hairy, strongly veined, toothed, oval and light green. Leaves turn yellow and harsh-scented when the plant is grown in full sun and dry soil. A variegated form may have gold-splashed scented leaves.
- **The flower** is small with 2-lipped pale yellow blooms in clusters, maturing through white to pale blue from summer to autumn..
- **The seed** is shiny, dark brown, with a white tip, tear-shaped about 1mm long.
- **Where to grow it:** full sun with midday shade in any moist soil. It can also be grown indoors.
- **Harvesting:** leaves can be picked anytime but the flavour is best when the flowers begin to open.



Uses:

1. Dry the leaves
2. Add fresh leaves to vinegar
3. Finely chop fresh leaves into salads, white sauces for fish, mayonnaise, sauerkraut, pickled herrings, poultry and pork.
4. Add to fruit salads, jellies, custards, fruit drinks, and wine cups.
5. Infuse fresh leaves for a tea , or float in a black tea.
6. Place around beehives and orchards to attract pollinating bees.
7. Rub on beehives before introducing a new swarm.
8. Add juice to furniture.
9. Place fresh leaves directly onto insect bites and sores, or apply a poultice. When applying to a bee sting, bruise the leaf directly on the site of the sting. There are other medical uses.

Reference: The complete book of Herbs by Lesley Bremness ISBN 08464380666. Published by Readers Digest Press in Australia 1988

