

CALENDULA - THE MEDICINAL HERB

Few plants are easier to grow than the calendula, an annual that is one of the most decorative of all herbs. It is one of the most well known and widely used herbs in Western herbal medicine.

The bright orange petals are an excellent remedy for red, inflamed skin, their antiseptic and healing properties helpful to prevent the spread of infection and speed up the rate of repair. Calendula is also a cleansing and detoxifying herb, and the infusion and tincture are used to treat chronic infections. The petals can also be used for food coloring and as an inexpensive substitute for saffron.

It reaches 30 to 60 centimetres in height, producing orange or yellow flowers on furry stems that are clasped by dark-green leaves that may be up to 15 centimetres long. All summer the brilliant flowers, 5 to 10 centimetres across, open in the early morning and close at dusk. They are striking in a flower bed and in flower arrangements.

Medicinal Uses

Made into a tincture or ointment it is by far one of the finest remedies for scratches, grazes, cuts and all open wounds. The oil is a natural antiseptic, and immediately it is applied the healing process commences. Calendula ointment will also act as a soothing balm for insect bites.

An infusion of the petals in a footbath will soothe aching feet, and the essential oil will remove soreness when rubbed into them.

A jar of calendula ointment in the first aid cabinet can be used to treat burns, cracked lips, weeping sores, wounds, cuts, abrasions, scratches, grazes and sore nipples, as well as general skin irritations, including itching, mosquito bite itch and insect bites, and to ease sprains, strains, wrenched ankles and painful swellings.

Calendula Ointment

4 tablespoons dried calendula petals or 1 handful fresh calendula petals
20 ml distilled water
20 ml aloe vera juice
15 g beeswax
100 ml almond oil
5 ml wheat germ oil
6 drops tincture benzoin (friar's balsam)

Add the measured amount of the herbs and almond oil to an enamel or stainless steel saucepan, bring to the boil, and then reduce to a simmer for 10 minutes. Remove from heat, strain, and add required quantity to recipe. In a double pan, melt the beeswax over a medium heat until completely liquid. Warm the herbal oil and add 70 ml, plus the wheat germ oil, distilled water, and aloe vera juice to the waxes. Stir until well blended, remove from heat and add tincture benzoin. Beat with a wooden spoon or electric mixer until cool and of a creamy texture. Store in a tightly capped, sterilised glass jar.

Calendula ointment is readily available from health-food stores and the health section of major supermarkets.