

## *The Many Benefits of Peppermint:* A Case for Stocking Up

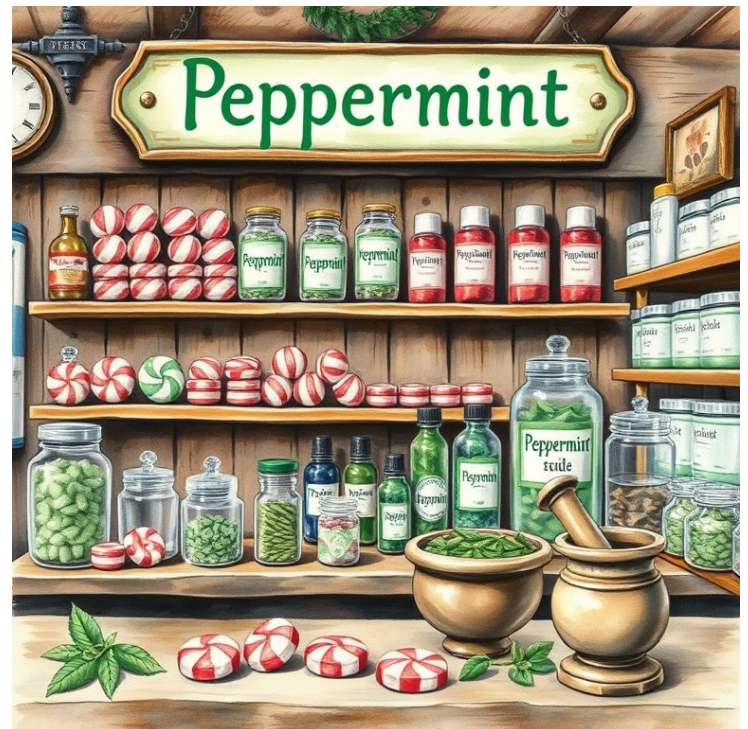
*Peppermint*, a hybrid of watermint and spearmint, has been a staple in herbal medicine for centuries, with its medicinal properties first recognized in the seventeenth century. Remarkably, its applications today remain largely unchanged, testament to the plant's enduring versatility and efficacy. Having several forms of peppermint on hand can serve as a first remedy for a myriad of ailments, making it an invaluable addition to any natural health kit.



From ancient Egypt to modern medicine, peppermint has been a trusted friend in soothing digestive complaints. The secret lies in its active ingredient, menthol, which possesses remarkable muscle-relaxing properties. Menthol works by blocking calcium channels in muscle cells, thereby reducing spasms and contractions throughout the digestive system. This action provides swift relief from symptoms such as abdominal

cramping, bloating, and gas. Moreover, menthol's cooling sensation helps to alleviate the burning associated with conditions like heartburn and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

*Peppermint's* benefits extend beyond the digestive system, with historical records showing its use in treating respiratory problems. The menthol in peppermint has a potent decongestant effect, acting as a natural expectorant to loosen and thin mucus, making it easier to cough up. It also soothes sinus membranes and aids in relaxation, providing relief from symptoms such as coughs, colds, and congestion. Today, peppermint is found in various over-the-counter remedies, including throat lozenges and mints for indigestion.



*Peppermint's* analgesic properties have been recognized since ancient times, with civilizations using it topically to relieve muscle and joint pain, as well as headaches. The menthol in peppermint works by activating specific receptors in the skin, leading to a sensation of coolness and numbness that can help to alleviate pain. Today,



peppermint is still used in this way, often in the form of balms or creams.

Both historically and today, peppermint is commonly used to make teas and infusions, often as a digestive aid or refreshing beverage. To harness its benefits, simply collect peppermint leaves just as they begin to flower, dry them in a warm place out of the sun, and store in a glass jar. Steep a dried leaf or two in hot water for 5-10 minutes to make a soothing, stomach-settling tea. A few drops of peppermint essential oil added to a diffuser makes a refreshing, decongestant steam.



Peppermint's unique flavor has always made it a popular ingredient in food and drinks, candies and gums, mint juleps and peppermint schnapps. Its culinary uses are myriad, from adding a refreshing twist to salads and sauces to flavoring desserts and beverages. Having peppermint on hand not only provides health benefits but also expands culinary possibilities.

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