peppermint

This therapeutic herb does a lot more than put the cool in candy

Adding lively aroma and fresh flavor to after-dinner mints, candy canes, and those iconic patties, peppermint (Mentha piperita) owes its cool burst to menthol. This volatile oil “relaxes the smooth muscle of the digestive tract to soothe a wide range of stomach woes, including indigestion and gas,” explains Jenn Dazey, ND, of Bastyr University. A November 2008 research review in the British Medical Journal suggests that peppermint oil may help ease symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome. Peppermint also aids in thinning mucus when battling a pesky cold, Dazey says.
For beautiful bouquets of fresh peppermint at bargain prices, shop for the herb at Asian grocery stores.

EAT IT UP
Consider brightening a fruit salad, roasted root vegetables, tomato soups, mashed potatoes, or fiery curries with a handful of chopped peppermint leaves. Whenever possible, choose superior-flavored fresh leaves over dried. Because the mint you buy in the supermarket is often spearmint, which has less menthol, try growing your own organic peppermint. The herb will easily flourish in a pot on your deck or a sunny windowsill; just keep the soil moist.

To brew a tea for help in settling the stomach and aiding digestion, Dazey recommends pouring 1 cup of steaming water over eight to 10 fresh peppermint leaves or 1 to 2 teaspoons dried leaves, and steeping covered so that the volatile oils don’t escape. You can enjoy this tea safely four to five times daily—unless you have acid reflux or gallbladder issues, then it’s best not to imbibe. When choosing packaged peppermint teas, look for sealed individual tea bags to ensure the healing oils are not lost, advises Dazey: “If the box smells like peppermint, don’t buy it.”

Minty Winter Tabbouleh
SERVES 6 | VEGAN
Chopped fresh herbs are the dominant ingredient in this grain salad. For beautiful bouquets of fresh peppermint at bargain prices, shop for the herb at Asian grocery stores.

Made from the volatile oils of peppermint leaves, aromatic pure peppermint extract can be used to gussy up chocolate mousse and cakes, smoothies, homemade sorbet, hot cocoa, and frosting for cupcakes and cookies.

To ease stomach ailments, take 0.2 milliliter of peppermint oil in enteric-coated capsules up to three times daily, 30 minutes before meals. For respiratory conditions and to aid breathing, inhale the steam from 2 cups of boiling water spiked with one drop of peppermint oil, up to three times a day.

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