

THE OUTSIDER

Illinois Extension Horticulture serving Henry, Mercer, Rock Island, and Stark



PEPPERMINT

Peppermint is a versatile herb celebrated for its distinct aroma, refreshing flavor, and abundant uses in and beyond the kitchen.

MENTHA X PIPERITA

Once considered it's own species, peppermint is understood to be a hybrid between water mint (*Mentha aquatica*) and spearmint (*Mentha spicata*), peppermint is a hardy perennial. A vigorous plant, it prefers full sun and rich moist soils but will tolerate a wide range of site conditions except for dry soils. The plant has been described as aggressive due to its tolerance for a range of sites and ability to spread via **rhizomes**.

Due to the vigor and potential for abundant spread, growing in a container is recommended to help control the spread. A container 12 to 16 inches in size is adequate to support the plants which reach a mature size of one to three feet round.

Leaves and flowers are ornamental and edible. Leaves are lance-shaped with toothed serrations on the leaf edges. Terminal spikes of flowers appear in summer in shades of pink and purple.

GROWING VOCABULARY

Rhizomes are specialized stem structures that grow horizontally from a parent plant on the surface or just below the surface of soil. Easily mistaken for roots, rhizomes are stem tissue therefore have nodes, internodes, and a terminal bud. From the nodes, shoots develop on the upper portion and roots develop on the lower portion. If separated from the parent plant, the plants formed at rhizome nodes are capable of self-supporting...meaning they are a new plant!



NATIVE RELATIVES

Peppermint is considered native to Europe, however Illinois does have *Mentha* species. A distinct identifying characteristic of members of the *Mentha* genus are the 'square' stems. The central and lateral stems of members of the mint family have four distinct angles on the stems that can be felt by trying to roll the stem between two fingers. They can also be seen if the stem is cut or with close observation of a plant. Spearmint (*Mentha spicata*) and Field mint (*Mentha arvensis*) species are believed to be native *Mentha* in Illinois.



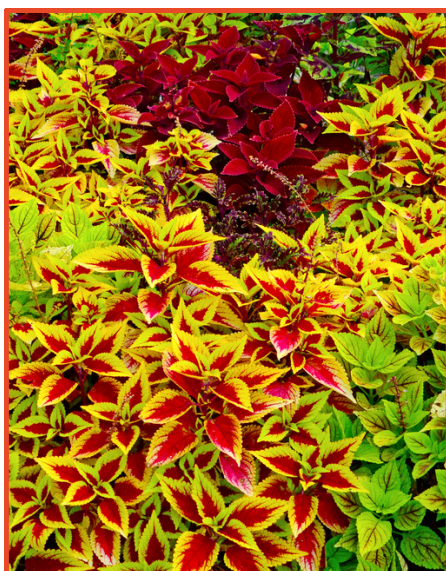
MENTHA RELATIVES IN HORTICULTURE

Other species within the mint family (Lamiaceae) are widely available the landscape industry. These species continue to exhibit the same square stem characteristics. Some of the more common *Mentha* cousins include:

- Agastache* spp (Giant hyssop, Hummingbird mint)
- Ajuga reptans* (Bugleweed)
- Calamintha nepeta* (Calamint)
- Coleus* spp. (Coleus)
- Lamium* spp. (Spotted Dead Nettle)
- Melissa officinalis* (Lemon Balm)
- Monarda fistulosa* (Wild Bergamot, Beebalm)
- Nepeta* spp. (Catnip)
- Salvia* spp. (Salvia)



Bugleweed



Coleus



Beebalm



Salvia



USES

Peppermint and other members of the mint family are used as an herb in cooking and baking. Peppermint tea is made by steeping the crushed leaves of a plant in hot (not boiling) water for five to ten minutes. Sweeteners are an optional addition.

Peppermint leaves and flowers are edible and may be used as a garnish for salads, desserts, and drinks. Peppermint extract is used to add flavor to baked goods, sauces, and marinades. Below are a few recipes from Illinois Extension that use mint as an ingredient.

Research suggests that the main volatile components of peppermint oil (menthol and menthone) offer a number of health benefits including significant antimicrobial and antiviral properties, evidence indicates antioxidant properties and some potential as an antiallergenic. In studies where peppermint oil was used with human subjects, some benefits to respiratory and gastrointestinal benefits were observed but additional research is needed.



Peppermint oil



Peppermint tea

Mint Limeade (serves 4)

1 quart (4 cups) water
1/2 cup lime juice (about 2 limes)
1/2 cup sucralose (Splenda®) or sugar
10-15 fresh mint leaves

Instructions: Add 1 cup of water, lime juice, sucralose (or sugar) and mint leaves to a blender. Blend until mint leaves are finely chopped. Add remaining 3 cups water; blend until thoroughly mixed. Pour over ice and store the remaining limeade in the refrigerator.

https://extension.illinois.edu/sites/default/files/mint_limeade.pdf

OUTSIDER ACTION

Try these activities to be more of an Outsider

- Share your favorite peppermint recipe with a neighbor or friend.
- Make plans to grow one variety of mint in a container next summer.

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