

Yarrow

Achillea millefolium



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Personal Experience and History

My first introduction to Yarrow was five years ago in Northern California during an herbal medicine course. The bright white flowers were scattered all around my teachers' garden and after hearing the name and making note of its characteristics, I began to see Yarrow everywhere! It was scattered on the roadside and along the path of most of my hikes and bike rides. This plant's energy became special to me as I encountered it more frequently and began to read about its medicinal properties. When we finally covered Yarrow in the materia medica portion of the program, my teacher, Karyn Sanders, shared the energetic actions and folklore of this plant along with its western herbalism uses. Those legends and stories have stuck with me and gave such a rich historical picture of this plant, both in physical and spiritual medicine.

Its latin name *Achillea millefolium* is said to be associated with the Greek warrior, Achilles. The story reports that Achilles was gifted Yarrow plants from Chiron, the wise centaur, who told him to use the flowering tops to stop the excessive bleeding in his wounded soldiers during battle. Similarly, it is said that when Achilles was born, his mother held him by the heel and dipped him in a bath of Yarrow tea to protect him from harm. Achilles died from a arrow to his achilles heel, where the yarrow tea did not touch.

Additionally, the Yarrow plant is associated with the I Ching, a divination ritual in China, in which 64 long, straight Yarrow stalks are used to read messages in the hexagrams associated with this form of divination. The plant is also associated with good luck, and it is said that if one makes a wish on the first flower bloom of the season, the wish will come true. Yarrow flowers have historically been used in rituals of union, marriage, and love spells (Grieve, 864). According to my teacher's Choctaw ancestral knowledge, Yarrow is considered "Wolf Medicine", which has the following associations:

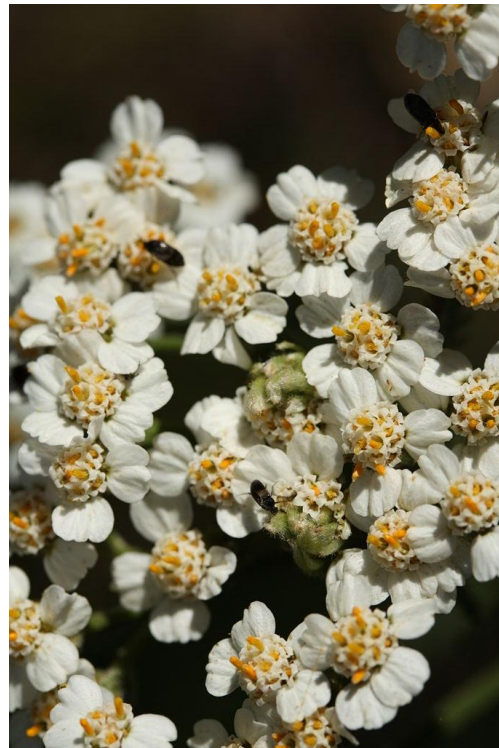
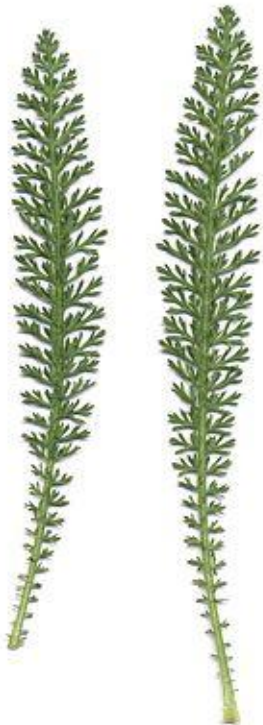
- Territory and personal boundaries
- Being in healthy community
- Differentiating your energy from others; distinguishing merging vs intimacy
- Knowing ones space, limits and capacity
- Other "Wolf" plants include: Wolf Berry, True Solomon's Seal, Ocotillo

Botany

Achillea millefolium (millefolium = thousand leaves, due to its many feathery leaves)

Family: Asteraceae (Daisy family)

Common names: Milfoil, Old Man's Pepper, Soldier's Woundwort, Thousand Weed, Nose Bleed, Bloodwort, Yarroway.



https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/d/d0/Achillea_millefolium_scan.jpg/170px-Achillea_millefolium_scan.jpg

Yarrow is widespread and abundant across the country from Ponderosa forests to timberline and as low as 2,500 ft in elevation. Originating in Europe, Yarrow has fully naturalized across the United States. The white flowers bloom from June to September and can be seen along roads, paths, meadows, valleys and pastures. The small snow white flower clusters bloom into flat-topped umbrella shape. Though traditionally just the flowers were harvested, according to Michael Moore it is best to harvest and use all the aerial parts (leaves and flowers), as the upper stem and leaves retain their strength longer. To harvest the aerial parts, simply cut the stem just below the lowest green leaves. The root can also be dug up and used medicinally. According to Michael Moore and Christopher Hedley, the root has been used successfully for tooth pain (as a poultice or tincture directly on gums), mild joint and muscle pain, and rheumatism..

Preparation and Dosage

The whole flowering plant can be used dried or fresh as a tincture, using a 50% alcohol solution. If using fresh herb, Michael Moore recommends a 1:2 ratio of herb to solvent by volume, or 1:5 for dried herb. Karyn Sanders recommends simmering Yarrow for up to 2 hours before adding alcohol for tincture. This method incorporates heat, water, and alcohol extractions. Dosage varies depending on condition and individual, but this plant is considered very safe and may be used freely. Karyn Sanders recommends 10-30 drops twice daily for chronic conditions, and 30 drops ever 3-4 hours for acute conditions, as needed.

For tea, infuse 1 oz dried herb to 1 quart hot water and steep covered for 5-10 minutes. For chronic conditions in adults, drink 1/2-1 cup daily, and for acute conditions, drink 1 cup every 2-3 hours as needed.

Actions

Energetics: according to Karyn Sanders, Yarrow is cooling and stimulating. However, other sources, including Matthew Wood suggest it can be both warming and cooling.

“It is both cooling and warming, fluid generating and controlling. Remedies with contradictory but complementary properties are often of great utility since they are able to normalize opposing conditions. This is true for yarrow.” (Wood 2009)

The flower essence of Yarrow is used for 'spiritual protection', and especially indicated for those who are strongly affected by other peoples' energy. As described earlier in relation to Wolf Medicine, it is helpful for those who need to build, clarify, or solidify boundaries, be they physical or emotional.

A notable action in Yarrow is its ability to regulate blood flow. It can be used to stop bleeding in wounds, but it can also help to bring healthy blood flow to areas of the body when there is stagnancy (ie. bruising, varicosities, pain). This is also true internally, especially in relation to regulation of menstruation. The following are general actions and medicinal uses of Yarrow:

- Vulnerary, antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, analgesic, anti-spasmodic, carminative, cholagogue, diaphoretic, hemostatic
- Styptic: helps to stop bleeding and hemorrhaging: internal, external, small, or major
 - Can use externally on wounds as a poultice by macerating the fresh herb with water or having the injured patient chew the plant, then pack directly on wound. If fresh Yarrow is unavailable, dried leaves can be rehydrated into poultice, or salve can be used.

- Emmenagogue and menstrual regulator: Helps stimulate uterus when there is stagnancy; can help bring on menses, can help with excessive menstrual bleeding
 - "Universal regulator of female reproductive functions from pre-puberty to post menopause" -Peter Holmes (Hedley)
- Aids with uterine prolapse and fibroids (stagnation that needs stimulation)
- Helpful for prostatitis and early prostate hyperplasia
- Soothing and anti-inflammatory for skin; rashes, scrapes, cuts, itching, bug bites, bee stings, eczema, dry skin
- Bitter, digestive stimulant; stimulates bile flow
- Helpful for lack of appetite, stomach cramps, flatulence, gastritis, gallbladder/liver issues, and internal hemorrhage
- Improves integrity and elasticity of blood vessels; can be helpful with varicosities
- Helps to move stagnant blood; great to use externally for bruises
- Tea is helpful for severe colds, especially with dry fevers
- Colds and flus with phlegm in the respiratory tract
- Infusion for scalp and hair rinse, to promote healthy hair and prevent balding
- Chronic cystitis and urethritis
- Post-partum bleeding: sitz bath in yarrow to help heal tearing
- Used the infusion as a wash or soak for blistered, torn up feet or hands
- Use in hot, dry fevers if there is trouble breaking a sweat - use warm tea or tincture in warm water

Combinations and Formulas

- Pair Uva Ursi for droopy bladder and urinary tract infections
- Combine with Elderberry and Peppermint for colds, drink as a hot water infusion
- For an anti-inflammatory skin salve, combine with Calendula and Lavender flowers (see recipe below)
- For a soothing, anti-inflammatory tea, combine with Licorice, Marshmallow, and Calendula
- Pair with Ginger or Capsicum for a circulatory stimulant

Contraindications

- Not to be used internally with animals, as it contains some salicylates
- Pregnancy (can be stimulating to uterus)
- Generally a very safe herb, though large amounts over a long period of time is not recommended

References

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- Moore, Michael. "Yarrow." *Medicinal Plants of the Mountain West*, Museum of New Mexico Press, 2003, pp. 269–270.
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Anti-inflammatory Healing Skin Salve

For use on minor cuts, scrapes, skin rashes, dry skin, bug bites, itchy skin, open sores, blisters, burns, bruises, rub on temples to soothe headaches

Ingredients:

2 parts Yarrow infused oil (I used dried yarrow leaves and flowers in a blend of 2 parts Jojoba oil and 1 part fractionated coconut oil)

1 part Calendula infused oil (I used dried calendula flowers in pure Jojoba oil)

1 part Lavender infused oil (I used dried lavender flowers in Olive Oil)

Bees Wax (6 parts carrier oil to 1 part wax)

Rosemary Essential Oil (about 5 drops per ounce of salve)

Tea Tree Essential Oil (about 5 drops per ounce of salve)

Preparation:

To make the oil infusions, I used the slow-cooker method: In a slow cooker, cover dried herb with carrier oil of choice until it is a 'thick vegetable stew' consistency. Cover and set to "Warm" for 48 hours. Let cool and strain oil through muslin cloth, discarding herb.



Measure the infused oils in ounces (and write down this measurement) and combine the oils in the top bowl of a double broiler so they are not over direct flame. Calculate the approximate amount of bees wax needed, using a ratio of 1 part bees wax (in ounces) to 6 parts oil (in ounces). Rather than melting the beeswax prior, I chose to shave/grate in the pre-measured bees wax (I keep my bar of bees wax in the freezer with an old cheese grater that is dedicated for this purpose. The cold wax allows for easier grating). The oil should be just warm enough to melt the wax shavings.

Once wax is melted, remove from heat. (Option to test a spoonful of the salve and put in freezer for a couple minutes to test consistency.) As the salve begins to cool add the Rosemary and Tea Tree essential oils. Pour into a container with a spout for easy pouring so the salve can then be poured into smaller containers to cool and harden.