

Chamomile

Matricaria recutita L.

Asteraceae Family



aka

German Chamomile

Wild Chamomile

Blue Chamomile

Roman Chamomile vs. German Chamomile



When in England . . .

While chamomile is commonly used as a catchall name for multiple varieties, Roman Chamomile and German Chamomile are two different species that are often confused when referring to chamomile in herbal communities.

Roman Chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*) originates in England, where it is primarily grown and used today. Its chemical constituents are similar to those in German Chamomile but differ in concentration. There have been less studies conducted for Roman Chamomile, and because German Chamomile is more readily available, its use is more common.

What's in a Name?

The origin of the name chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*) is derived from the Greek “chamos” meaning ground and “melos” meaning apple - named for its sweet, apple-like aroma and closeness to the ground.

German Chamomile's namesake “Matricaria” (*Matricaria recutita*) means “womb” or “matrix”, also derived from “mater” meaning “mother”.



In the Wild

“Plant’s Physician”, Heal
Thy...Neighbors?

Dubbed the “plant’s physician”, chamomile appears to affect its plant neighbors growing nearby - helping the plants to either stay in good health or recover from disease. This could be because it prevents transfer of any toxicities - if present - in the soil.

Preferring soil that is dry and sandy, it grows easily and is an annual that loves sun, and so blooms in spring and summer (around May through October). While *Chamaemelum nobile* (Roman Chamomile) grows closer to the ground and has smaller flowers, *Matricaria recutita* (German Chamomile) is taller in height, growing up to 3 feet, with larger blossoms. Originally wildcrafted, chamomile is now cultivated on a global level. With German Chamomile, the flowers make the most potent medicine (contrary to Roman Chamomile, whose medicine is equally potent in both its flowers and leaves).

The ancient Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians prized chamomile, the Greeks using it in their traditional medicine and the Egyptians considering it sacred.



In the Body

Relaxes Stomach, Calms Nerves,
Eases Tension

Chamomile acts upon the organs, systems, and tissues in the physical body and affects each of the systems: digestive, nervous, (upper) respiratory, female reproductive, and immune.

The primary system affected is the **digestive system**. Its bitter carminative effects stimulate secretions in the stomach, and its antispasmodic and anti-inflammatory properties reduce indigestion and inflammation in the gut. These effects make chamomile a great remedy for issues in the GI tract such as diverticulitis and IBS, as well as general stomach tension or upset.

Most commonly regarded as a nervine and relaxant, chamomile affects the **nervous system** by switching from sympathetic (fight or flight) to parasympathetic (rest and digest) to ease tension and relax the body. While considered only mildly sedating compared to stronger herbs like valerian, because chamomile's effects reach both the nervous and digestive systems at once, its use can be just as powerful. Symptoms unique to either system can reflect the other (such as with a

nervous stomach), and so targeting either system can also affect the other.

Interestingly, this also complements research supporting the connection between the gut (digestive system) and the brain (nervous system).

Chamomile's relaxant and anti-inflammatory qualities also give it a soothing effect for the mucus membranes in the **upper respiratory system** - calming the lungs, throat, and sinuses - and due to its antimicrobial properties, eliminates any pathogens that may be present. The respiratory system is primarily affected via steam inhalation methods (for relief for those with asthma or cold/flu symptoms).

Its relaxing and soothing effects also contribute to alleviation of symptoms related to PMS and other female-specific ailments, due to its action upon the **female reproductive system**. Chamomile's ability to relax smooth muscles relieves any cramping, and its bitter energetics increase downward energy in the body, promoting an easy menstrual flow and releasing any congestion. The bitter actions also stimulate liver function - which Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) links back to the female reproductive system.

Chamomile also acts as a supportive of the **immune system**, though it is not considered a direct stimulant to the immune system (as with echinacea). Its diaphoretic and antimicrobial actions make it a great herb to use when needing an immune boost, or even when sick with a fever and combined with other herbs.



On the Subtle Levels

Balancing, Harmonizing, Releasing

In *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* at the end of Peter's adventures in Mr. McGregor's garden, Mrs. Rabbit sees the harried state Peter's in and puts him to bed with a cup of chamomile tea. Without even really thinking about it, we usually reach for chamomile whenever we feel the need to slow down or instill calm. Just as chamomile relaxes the systems in our physical bodies, its effects can also be felt in our emotional bodies as well.

In the same way that chamomile teaches us to balance our lives by slowing down, it also works on a more subtle level to balance our emotions. With its bitter energetics, chamomile is a great herb for balancing the fiery emotions of Pitta dosha, and its relaxing and soothing properties can help to balance the anxious tendencies of Vata dosha, working to cultivate a sense of inner peace and harmony unique to the individual. Chamomile also works to release any emotions that may be stuck - such as with the emotional congestion often present alongside the physical congestion accompanying menstruation. In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), German Chamomile especially is soothing to shen.



In Essence

Soothing the Self

Because its taste and potency is on the mild side, Chamomile is considered a safe and effective herb to give to children - or to adults wanting or needing to get in touch with their inner child. Its ability to balance emotions can be a therapeutic herbal remedy for children experiencing frequent emotional outbursts or wanting attention in excess. In this way, chamomile acts much like a caring mother to provide calm for the child (or child at heart). Sensitive children are especially affected, and chamomile has also shown to be effective for use with ADD/ADHD children, improving their focus.

Chamomile's gentle nature can also be healing for any family pain that may be stuck in our physical/energetic bodies from childhood trauma, allowing us to be kids again.

Chamomile Flower Essence for Animals

Chamomile is also gentle enough to share with your furry friends! Its flower essence can be used to calm barking, soothe nervous puppies or sensitive/high-strung animals, or relax the stomach when in distress (such as gas or vomiting).



Why Blue Chamomile?

While the essential oil for Roman Chamomile produces a clear or yellow color, the essential oil for German Chamomile looks blue in color, the shade described as cobalt or indigo. The blue color is produced by the steam distillation converting matricin to chamazulene (which colors the oil blue). German Chamomile essential oil also yields higher levels of α -bisabolol terpenoids.

In addition to the terpenoids (anti-inflammatory and spasmolytic), its other chemical constituents are coumarins (antispasmodic, antibacterial, and anti-fungal), and flavonoids apigenin and luteolin (anti-inflammatory, carminative, and anti-spasmodic). Apigenin binds to GABA receptors for a mild sedative effect.



Medicine-Making

Fresh vs. Dried

Fresh chamomile flowers offer less of the bitter taste, while the dried flowers are more bitter. Fresh flowers are preferable when preparing a tincture due to higher extraction of the volatile oils. Fresh flowers will also lend more of its spasmolytic and inflammatory actions, while the dried flowers more of the bitter energetics - and so generally an infusion is used when treating digestion or GI issues, as well as gut inflammation. When steeping an infusion, keeping the infusion covered will prevent the volatile oils and aromatic qualities from escaping by way of steam.

Topical preparations may also be used for soothing skin irritations/redness.

Preparing Tincture

1:2 fresh herb (1:5 dried)

50%-60% alcohol (40% for dried)

Dosage: 30 drops (10-20 for kids)

Tastes/Energetics

Sweet

Bitter (Cooling)

Aromatic (Slightly Warming)

Drying

Relaxing

Herbal Pairs

Chamomile w/:

Catnip

(“restlessness/nervous irritation”)

Valerian

(“extreme nervousness/stomach at fault”)

Motherwort

(“nervous indigestion/period headache”)

Formula Possibilities

Digestion Formula

20% chamomile (bitter, carminative)

20% dandelion root (bitter)

20% peppermint (carminative)

20% marshmallow (demulcent)

15% fennel (carminative)

5% licorice (demulcent)

Nerves Formula

20% chamomile (carminative, bitter nervine)

20% tulsi/holy basil (carminative)

20% lemon balm (carminative)

20% skullcap (bitter nervine)

20% motherwort (bitter nervine)

*Formula supportive to digestion as well

Menstrual Formula

50% chamomile (anti-inflammatory)

50% cramp bark (antispasmodic)

Children's Fever Formula

25% chamomile (diaphoretic)

25% lemon balm (diaphoretic)

25% peppermint

25% elderflower

*Add ginger for warmth

Contraindications/Side Effects

Caution with chamomile should be exercised if:

Allergic to ragweed or the Aster (Asteraceae) Family

Regular use of CNS depressants (opiates, alcohol, etc.)

Taking anticoagulant medications (such as Warfarin)

Preparations/Recipes

Chamomile Infusion

2 - 4 g herb

1 cup hot water

honey to taste (optional)

Steep 10-20 minutes with lid on. The longer the brewing time, the stronger the tea (and more bitter, especially if using dried).

*For a stronger, more medicinal brew: Fill 1 quart jar halfway with herb, pour over boiling water, and let steep 20 minutes with lid secured.

Child's Freezable Teething Chew

1 cloth of choosing

pre-made chamomile tea

Soak the cloth in chamomile tea. Place in freezer and keep on hand for teething children.

Eye Wash Formula

1 heaping tbsp of chamomile/fennel blend (1 part each)

1 cup distilled water

Infuse the herb in the water and let sit overnight (or until room temp) with lid on. Apply to eyes with cotton balls or eye cups for wash for any kind of eye condition.

Chamomile Oil

chamomile (dried)

olive oil (*swap w/ sesame for another Vata-pacifying option)

mason jar

Fill clean, dry jar with herb. Pour oil over herb, covering it by at least 1 inch (allow room for expansion). Keep jar in warm, dark place for 4-6 weeks, shaking every so often when the mood strikes. Once oil is ready, strain through a cheesecloth and pour into clean jar(s). Store in a cool, dark place.

"Chamo-flaged" Tea w/ Echinacea Root

Chamomile-echinacea tea is my own go-to tea at the onset of a cold/flu, and may also provide relief from respiratory discomfort. The taste of the chamomile helps to camouflage the taste of the echinacea root, which can be unpleasant to some.

1 - 2 tsp chamomile

1 - 2 tsp echinacea root

1 cup hot water

1 - 2 tsp honey (optional)

Steep the herbs 15-20 minutes with lid on. If desiring less of a bitter brew, start steeping the echinacea first and add chamomile closer to end of steep time (5-10 minutes).

*For a stronger brew, increase the echinacea to 1/4 cup dried herb (or 1/2 cup fresh).

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