

Ubiquitous yarrow — a marvelous medicinal plant

How to make yarrow salve

by Carol Phelps

Achillea millefolium is a common plant which grows all over North America and Europe. It is named after Achilles, who legend says was healed by yarrow when he acquired his famous heel wound in battle. It has been used for thousands of years, and has been found in Neanderthal burial caves dated to 60,000 years ago in the Mediterranean basin.

It is a lovely plant which grows abundantly in meadows and along roadsides, including all over the meadows of Staunton. It has soft-fernlike leaves and attractive white flowers in flat bunches at the top. It flowers from June to September. All the aerial (above ground) parts of the plant are useful.

It is an elegant and potent medicinal plant which has been used for a variety of ailments, but it is especially good for treating wounds. It is possible to easily make a very effective salve from yarrow in the kitchen which is more effective than drugstore remedies, according to a physician friend of mine who has been using this for her family and friends for 25 years. Her recipe is below.

When used topically, yarrow has three main useful properties for treating wounds. It is a powerful but natural styptic, meaning it stops bleeding. Historically, crushed fresh or dried leaves were used to pack wounds in the battlefield, hence the nickname “soldiers’ wound wart” (wart=plant)

It is rich in active compounds, including the alkaloid “achilleine” which has been shown in the laboratory to reduce clotting time. This makes it useful for nosebleeds, abrasions and cuts. It is also analgesic and reduces pain without causing numbness. Thirdly, it is also antibacterial, inhibiting infections. These properties make it extremely useful for treating household burns, abrasions; minor cuts especially paper cuts, rashes, sunburns, bug bites and stitch care.

Harvesting yarrow

Harvest yarrow throughout the summer by taking the growing aerial (above ground) parts, but leave the roots. It is not necessary to wait for them to flower, but if they are flowering, it is fine to include the flowers. Then dry them



away from windows and sunlight. Either hang them upside down by the stems, or lay out on a clean, dry kitchen or bath towel in a protected place. If you hang them, you can just put a rubber band around the stem ends, and suspend by a paper clip to a nail or line near the top of the room (similar to what was found in the Staunton Cabin). But simply drying on thin towels also works well.

When bone dry, you can either put them into large glass jars or a clean brown paper bag, but never plastic because it promotes mold. Or, you can simply wrap them up loosely in the drying towel and store in a basket away from light. Somewhere where they can breathe without being exposed to light, heat or moisture is best, such as a pantry or closet. They will last one to three years this way.

My friend tells me that this is really incredible for those nasty paper cuts—just put a bit of this on the cut and cover with a bandaid and it takes away the pain in five minutes. She says it works better than Silvadene ointment (the standard medical recommendation) for minor burns, up to second degree, for pain control and healing. And in use for cuts and abrasions, she says she has never seen anything treated with this become infected in 25 years.

How marvelous is our natural plant world, giving us the food, the oxygen, the medicine that nourishes us and our planet.

I would like to recognize my friend and mentor, Yale-trained Candace Corson, M.D., a gifted family physician from Indiana, with a special interest in foods and plants for natural healing, for this recipe.

References:

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<http://www.permaculture.co.uk/articles/yarrow-and-its-medicinal-benefits>

<http://naturalsociety.com/neanderthal-herb-yarro-heals-wounds-speeds-healing-stops-pain-boosts-mood/>

<https://naturalsci.wordpress.com/2012/07/30/how-old-is-herbal-medicine/>

For the preparation of the salve, you will need:

- A large spaghetti or similar pot.
- A wooden spoon or spatula.
- A candy thermometer if you have one, which can measure up to 250 degrees.
- A small to medium metal mesh strainer. (Not plastic)
- Pyrex measuring cups.
- Little glass jars. The little one oz. jelly jars which restaurants use are very good (go out to breakfast a lot with friends and collect them), or you can order some on-line from a company such as From Nature with Love.
- Decent quality olive oil: one liter or quart.
- Beeswax or coconut oil. 100 to 125 gm. (about 4 oz.).

My source recommends using a ratio of oil to beeswax of 10:1 or 8:1. This makes the salve a solid consistency at room temperature. Less beeswax makes it less solid, more beeswax, more solid. Based on 16 oz. per pound, and 2.2 lbs. per liter or kg, I think the amounts I quoted above should be right.

The dried yarrow, snipped into pieces short enough to be easily submerged in the pot.

The process:

Gently melt together the oil and beeswax in the large pot. Be careful not to let it boil, smoke or turn brown. The temperature should stay below 250 degrees F if you have a candy thermometer.

Take the dried plants and immerse as much as possible into the oil mixture. The more you can get in there, the stronger the extraction of the active ingredients. Press down with a wooden spatula or spoon. Simmer at low temperature (<250 degrees) for 10 minutes, watching carefully for smoking or browning.

Cool just enough to pour the liquid safely. One person can hold and tilt the pot, and a second person can hold back the mass of the yarrow with the spatula while it pours. Strain it into one or more pyrex measuring cups, and then fill the jars from there. It should partially solidify as it cools. Store in the refrigerator. This maintains its activity for up to 12 years.