



# Garden Clippings



Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery Success Sheet No. 34

## Mint

### Origin

Mint derives its name from Greek mythology. Mintha, or Minthe, was said to have been transformed into the herb mint when Persephone discovered that Pluto had been unfaithful with Mintha.

In later times, mint was dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Also, Jews strewed the floors of their temples with mint, enabling its clean aromatic perfume to enhance their place of worship.

### Description

Each type of mint contains specific oil. Menthol, commonly related to the peppermint plant, *Mentha piperata*, and carvone oil linked to the spearmint, *Mentha spicata*, are used in a variety of food dishes.

This plant is now found throughout Asia, Australia and Europe, and has been cultivated commercially in the United States since before the Civil War.

Mint is an aggressive plant. Rich, lush soil and plenty of sun and water make it a quickly spreading plant. Placing a barrier 12 inches into the soil with 2 inches left above the ground prevents the plant from moving.

Flower colors range from white to light pink to lilac. Leaves are dark green and elongated with finely toothed edges ending in a point on the peppermint plant. Spearmint leaves are round, bright green and crinkled. Bronze-coloured leaves are also available with bergamont mint, *Mentha piperata citrata*, also known as orange or lavender.

### Propagation

Seed propagation of all mints is difficult when done outdoors because of inconsistent

watering and weeding. Seeding indoors is preferable for this reason. When true leaves have formed, plants can be transplanted or relocated in the garden.

An alternative is asexual propagation. New plants can be generated by removing and planting 1" tips from growing stems. Also, underground stems can be tugged out gently and then potted. Division of an existing plant is also possible.

### Varieties

Besides peppermint and spearmint varieties, some others are chocolate mint, *Mentha piperata* 'Chocolate Mint,' which has a scented leaf; curly mint, *Mentha aquatica* var. *crispa*, which does very well in containers; woolly apple, *Mentha suaveolens*, with its slight apple fragrance and an ability to handle neglect if left with enough room to grow; Kentucky colonel *Mentha spicata* 'Kentucky Colonel,' which is commonly used in mint juleps; and the red-stemmed true double mint plant, *Mentha gracilis*, containing both menthol and carvone.

Pennyroyal *Mentha pulegium* should not be eaten but serve to keep insects away when dried and added to sachets.

### Conclusion

Mint adds an abundance of flavor to food dishes and many beverages. Today there are over a thousand varieties on the market. With a little effort and patience, anyone can grow any chosen variety.

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