

רוזמרין - Rosemary – Rosmarinus Officinalis

Rosemary – Symbol of Faithfulness & Love

The botanical name Rosmarinus is derived from the old Latin for 'dew of the sea,' a reference to its pale blue, dew-like flowers and the fact that it is often grown near the sea. In Israel, rosemary grows everywhere and not just by the sea. Since it is so prolific in the Holy Land, it is hard to believe that there is no mention of rosemary in the Torah. Possibly, it is mentioned with a different name, but which? It is hard to know. When googling 'rosemary in the Torah' the closest I get is, 'Torah scroll dedicated in Rosemary Hall!' Yet, 'rosemary in the Bible' generates a list of 11 Torah verses, which have



nothing to do with rosemary. The closest is, "Hashem is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures" (*Tehillim* 23:1-2). Rashi explains that since David begins to compare his sustenance to the pasture of a flock by saying, "Hashem is my shepherd," he describes his nourishment, as green pastures. David recited this psalm in the dry forest, which Hashem, moistened with the good of the World-to-Come. So perhaps, the evergreen, low maintenance rosemary was part of David's "green pastures" that strengthen his love of G-d. As a symbol of faithfulness, love and friendship, wedding couples used to carry rosemary to celebrate their love and fidelity. I like the ancient custom of entwining a wreath of rosemary or at least a few sprigs in the hair of the bride on her wedding day. Rosemary represents feminine love because it is a very tough and strong herb that grows very slowly.

The Blessing for the Scent of Rosemary

Rosemary is an attractive evergreen shrub with pine needle-like leaves. Its pleasant fragrance is pungently aromatic and somewhat camphoraceous. If we want to enjoy its scent, the correct blessing is,

ברוך אתה ה' אלהי הרוחות הטובות, בורא עצי בשמים

Baruch Ata Hashem Elokeinu Melech ha'olam boreh atzei besamim – 'Blessed are You Hashem... Creator of fragrant trees.' Since rosemary grows above the ground, has a hard woody stem and remains from year to year, it is considered a tree in Jewish law. This is reflected in the blessing on its fragrance. If you are not sure whether a plant is considered an herb or a tree, you can always say the general blessing, "...*boreh minei b'samim* – 'Creator of different types of aromatics.' This is the blessing that Ashkenazim recite for Havdalah. Since Havdalah is recited universally by Jews, who may not be so well versed in plant botany, the Ashkenazi halacha requires the general blessing on fragrance for Havdalah. This prevents someone from inadvertently saying the wrong blessing.

Rosemary for Remembrance

From time immemorial rosemary was known to strengthen the brain and memory.

"Rosemary comforteth the cold, weak and feeble brain in a most wonderful manner" (Botanist and herbalist John Gerard c. 1545-1612). According to scientists at the University of Cincinnati, the scent of rosemary is an effective memory stimulant

(<https://cals.arizona.edu/yavapai/anr/hort/byg/archive/growingrosemary.html>).

A 2012 human study concluded that the aroma of rosemary may boost cognitive performance. Healthy volunteers performed better on mental arithmetic tasks when exposed to cineole, one of the main chemical components of rosemary essential oil. The study suggests that the presence of 1,8-cineole in the blood can potentially enhance some aspects of cognition according to Mark Moss, PhD,

The Brain, Performance and Nutrition Research Centre at Northumbria University, Newcastle, UK (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3736918/>).

Commenting on the study for Medscape Medical News, Ilkay Orhan, PhD, said that essential oils stimulate cognition. Cineole exists in many essential oils. The compound has the ability to inhibit acetylcholinesterase, which is the key enzyme in the pathogenesis of Alzheimers disease. Thus, we may consider taking the preventative measure of adding a rosemary-potted plant for our desk in the office or study.

Medicinal Properties of Rosemary

Due to its salicylic acid (aspirin), rosemary tea or tincture is a natural alternative to synthetic aspirin for alleviating headaches, especially those related to indigestion. Rosemary helps to relax muscles, including the smooth muscles of the digestive tract and uterus. Therefore, it soothes indigestion and relieves menstrual cramps. I once heard an old wise woman of Jerusalem say that a sitz bath of strong rosemary tea is helpful to overcome infertility, since it relaxes the muscles of the uterus and opens the womb. Due to its tonic and stimulant properties, rosemary when added to a bath strengthens and refreshes, especially when used following an illness. Drinking rosemary tea is also an invigorating tonic and astringent. Warm rosemary tea is diaphoretic (sweats out the toxins). Therefore, it is a good remedy for colds. As a nervine, it also benefits the nervous system and relieves nervous depression. Rosemary is good for hair and scalp. An infusion of its leaves and flowers combined with borax makes one of the best hair-washes known. It is often added to shampoos and hair-lotions, because of its scent and stimulating effect on the hair-bulbs, which prevents premature baldness. It is also an effective remedy for the prevention of dandruff. As a rinse to lighten blond hair, and to condition, strengthen and tone all hair, try mixing rosemary infusion half-and-half with shampoo. In Israel, mothers put rosemary oil behind the ears of their young children to prevent lice.

Cancer Prevention Properties

Numerous studies done over the last several years show that rosemary oil helps prevent the development of cancerous tumors. One study, led by Chi-Tang Ho, Ph.D., professor in the Department of Food Science at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, showed that applying rosemary oil to the skin of experimental animals reduced their risk of cancer to half of those that did not receive the rosemary oil application. In other studies, animals whose diets contained some rosemary oil had about half the incidence of colon cancer or lung cancer compared with animals who did not ingest rosemary. Researchers at the University of Illinois in Urbana found that rosemary cut by half the incidence of breast cancer in animals at high risk for developing the disease. Future studies will demonstrate whether these properties extend to humans as well. See also 195 research studies listed in US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health

Spiritual Properties of Rosemary

Rosemary is one of the major spiritually purifying herbs. It can be used in herbal baths, inside cheesecloth or a coffee filter, tied with string and placed under the running bath water. Rosemary is also considered a protective herb. Place rosemary in a dream pillow or pillowcase to ward off bad dreams. Rosemary has an affinity for the head area. It clears away unwanted thoughts, lifts negative thinking in favor of a positive attitude, and assists with concentration. As an essential oil or in potpourris and sachets, the fragrance lifts the emotional spirit, grants a youthful outlook, and pleasant memories. Rosemary releases pressure surrounding your spiritual path, making it a great spiritual herb to keep on hand.

Hands On:

We have a ritual slaughterer in Bat Ayin who delivers organic, grass-fed meat. Here is my simple way of preparing this meat for our Friday night dinner. The fresh rosemary sprigs that I pick from my garden add a most savory flavor.

Organic Rosemary Rib Steak

- 1 kg (approximately 2 lbs.) organic rib steaks
- 1 large onion
- 3 minced garlic cloves
- 1 cup of red wine (dry or semisweet)
- ¼ cup Tamari soy sauce
- 5 Tbs. Fresh rosemary (3 Tbs. if dried)

1. Chop the onion and mince the garlic in a garlic squeezer.
2. Add the rosemary, wine and soy sauce.
3. Mix all the ingredients together – This is your marinade sauce.
4. Arrange the meat in stainless steel or glass baking pan.
5. Pour the marinade sauce over the meat; make sure to cover all the meat.
6. Place in fridge and let it marinade overnight if possible.
7. Cover the baking pan and place in the oven, bake in medium heat for about 2 hours.
8. Uncover the meat and broil on high heat for 5-15 minutes, turning it to brown on all sides. Enjoy!