

מרווה רפואי – Sage – *Salvia Officinalis*

Sage – a Salvation Bush Saving Us from All Illness

The rainy season with its change of climate often brings sore throat, coughs and sniffles in its wake. At this time of year, the sage bush in my garden smiles at me with its slim, silvery leaves, begging to be trimmed and consumed both as treatment and as a preventative cure. Sage has a tradition of culinary and medicinal use over 2,000 years. Herbalists from every corner of the earth recommend it for just about every condition: from sore throat, indigestion, PMS, to snakebite and Alzheimer's disease. In medieval times, the French called the herb 'toute bonne,' which means, 'good for everything.' The Arabs have the following saying: "He, who has sage in his possession, removes sickness from his home." The various names for the plant in almost every European tongue derive from the classical name, 'salvia,' from the Latin 'salvere' which means, 'to save,' indicating the great medical value of the plant. In ancient Greece and Rome, sage was used for longevity. There is even a tradition that those who eat enough sage will achieve immortality. The old saying goes something like, "How can a man die [or get old] if he has sage growing in his garden?" I've also heard the following saying: "Wherever a wise woman lives, sage grows in abundance." It is certainly wise to plant a sage in your garden or patio.



A Hint of Sage in the Torah

Thirty-nine kinds of sage grow in Israel, such as Jerusalem Sage, Judean Sage, Palestinian Sage and Nazareth Sage. Being a vital ancient herb, so suited to the climate of the Land of Israel, it is hard to believe that sage is not mentioned in our holy books. I was disappointed when I found nothing in the written or oral law about מרווה/*Marvah* – sage. Yet, one researcher identified sage with מֶרְמֵהִין/*Marmehin*, one of the remedies mentioned in the *Babylonian Talmud, Gittin* 69b. Perhaps, the Arabs have retained a vestige of the original Talmudic name, as 'sage' in Arabic is מרמיה/*Marmia* to this day. Efraim and Hannah HaReuveini noticed a striking resemblance between the shape of the seven-branched Menorah and the Israeli sage bush (Palestinian Sage). It has one central branch from which emanate several parallel, paired branches. In addition, sage develops knobs and flowers on its branches during spring. This reflects the description of the Menorah as it states, "He made the menorah of pure gold; of hammered work he made the menorah, its base and its stem, its goblets, its knobs, and its flowers were [all one piece] with it" (*Shemot* 37:17). The Hebrew word מרווה/*Marvah* may derive from מנורה/*Menorah* or מוריה/*Moriah* – the name of the Temple Mount. The first part of the word מר/*mar* means bitter. Indeed, the bitter taste of the sage imbues it with its cleansing power and ability to eliminate germs. The Hebrew word מרווה means 'to satisfy thirst,' perhaps, because the plant is very drying and doesn't need a lot of water.

A Chief Cold & Cough Remedy

Sage is one of the chief herbs in B'erot Bat Ayin Cold & Cough Remedy. Its warming, diaphoretic, antiseptic and antibiotic properties empower it to combat the various germs of colds and coughs, whereas its antispasmodic and expectorant qualities enable it to soothe coughing and clear out phlegm. During the rainy season, especially when people in the vicinity are sniffing and coughing, I recommend gargling with sage tea as a preventive measure, which also helps those who are suffering from hoarseness, laryngitis, sore throat or flu. The antibacterial properties in sage also make it a useful mouthwash for gingivitis. Recent laboratory studies support the use of sage to

guard against infection. It has demonstrated an ability to fight against several infection-causing bacteria. Pour boiling vinegar over fresh sage leaves and then lean over to inhale the vapors as an alternative way to heal sore throat.

Wise Women's Sage Tea

Sage has estrogenic compounds and may help menopausal women find some relief from hot flashes. Drinking sage tea is also beneficial for women who have had a hysterectomy. Sage has traditionally been used to promote menstruation, and there are some studies that indicate it may indeed help stimulate uterine contractions. Modern research has shown that sage is helpful in reducing premenstrual cramps. It stimulates the muscles of the uterus, and therefore pregnant women should not consume highly concentrated forms of sage, although using it as a culinary spice has not been shown to have this effect. Sage is also contra-indicated for breastfeeding mothers, but works perfectly to dry up the milk of mothers who are ready to wean their baby.

Sage for the Brain

Sage has been known to improve memory since ancient times. "Sage is singularly good for the head and quickeneth the nerves and memory" (Herbalist John Gerard, 1597). Half a century later, Nicholas Culpeper, claimed that sage "heals the memory, warming and quickening the senses." Modern research has begun to prove the inherent connection between brain-health and sage that herbalists have known since olden times. Scientists at the Universities of Newcastle and Northumbria found that people given sage oil tablets performed much better in a word recall test. One of the active ingredients in sage may boost levels of a chemical that helps carry information in the brain that is essential for memory. Sage protects the 'chemical messengers' by inhibiting the enzyme acetylcholinesterase (AChE) which breaks down one of the brain's 'chemical messengers,' acetylcholine. These findings were published in a memory study in the journal *Pharmacology, Biochemistry and Behavior*, Volume 75, Issue 3, Pages C02, 497-730 (June 2003).

(See also <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12895685>).

Hands On:

Sage is not only a potent medicine but also a choice herb in gourmet cooking. It goes well with cheeses and fatty meats. In addition, it is also a natural salt substitute. You only need a bit of sage to flavor any dish.

Sage Muffins (A favorite with my students)

- 2 Cups whole-wheat flour
- 1 Tablespoon baking powder
- ¼ Cup sweetener (brown sugar, molasses, honey)
- ½ Tablespoon salt
- 2 Eggs
- 1 Cup milk fruit-juice or water
- 7 Tablespoons oil
- ¼ Cup currants or raisins

1. Mix dry and wet ingredients.
2. Add ¼ cup fresh, finely chopped sage.
3. Pour into a muffin tray, filling each cup ¾ full.
4. Bake about 20 minutes at 180 degrees.