

חֶלְמִית, לַחַם עֲרֵבִית, חוֹבִיזָה

Mallow – Malva Sylvestris

Nourishing, Mild, Mucilaginous Mallow

Mallow is one of the favorites in my daily foraging for greens to fill my green smoothie. It's quite invasive and spreads throughout my vegetable garden, herbs and flowers. I'm so happy to discover that it also grows abundantly at the edge of my back-garden from the compost piles of our chicken coop waste. When learning that mallow contains, Vitamins A,B,C,E; calcium; magnesium; zinc; selenium; potassium and more, I'm not surprised that my neighbor made a special mallow bed in her vegetable garden. This plant is one of the earliest cited in recorded literature. [Horace](#) mentions it in reference to his own diet, which he describes as very simple: "As for me, olives, endives, and mallows provide sustenance" (Horace, *Odes* 31, verse 15, ca 30 BC). One of the superstitions of the ancient Greeks was to plant mallow on the graves of loved ones. [Lord Monboddo](#) translated an ancient [epigram](#), demonstrating that mallow was planted upon the graves of the ancients. This stemmed from the belief that the dead could feed on such perfect plants (Letter from [Monboddo](#) to John Hope, April, 1779). However, mallow is indeed quite useful for the living. I use fresh leaves whenever they are available. Sometimes, I harvest extra to dry or freeze for later use. I eat the leaves raw or cooked. They are rather [mucilaginous](#), with a mild pleasant flavor, and blend nicely with soups, where they act as a thickener. Mild tasting young mallow leaves make a very good substitute for lettuce in a salad. Older leaves are better cooked, blended or brewed in tea. The popular sweet known as 'marshmallow' was originally cooked from the juice extracted from the root of this herb – unfortunately, that is no longer the practice, and I dread to think exactly what goes into marshmallows these days!

Soothing, Softening, Comforting Mind and Heart Opener

Mallow is a common medicinal plant, famous for its emollient or softening properties, and its dazzling flowers. Its constitution is gently demulcent, expectorant, laxative, softening and moistening. The primary use for mallow and its relatives is as a soothing demulcent, suitable for many inflamed conditions afflicting the mucous membranes of the urinary tract, respiratory and digestive system. Malva alleviates dry coughs and bronchitis. It makes a useful mild antitussive to soothe coughs in general, as well as to ease laryngitis and pneumonia. The root also has a lubricating effect on the joints and skeleton in general and is useful in the treatment of arthritis, related joint conditions, as well as on stiff muscles. The Latin word, 'Malva' derives from the Greek word for 'soft' – 'malache', referring to the emollient properties of the plant. The mallow plant spirit is likewise softening. It can soften up inflexible mental attitudes. It also helps to open the hearts of those who are hard-hearted and unable to feel their own emotions. Some herbalists add it to prescriptions for children undergoing stress and upheaval, to soothe, comfort and provide a stable framework. Mallow may also be useful for those who feel isolated and lonely, enabling them to form better, more trusting relationships and to communicate more freely. Mallow encourages patients to have more tolerance for those around them together with greater mental and emotional flexibility.



Is Mallow Mentioned in the Torah?

Mallow is mentioned once in the Tanach according to the Jerusalem Bible and many other English bible translations. When Iyov (Job) reflects on his current misery and his loss of respect in the community, he describes the low character of the men who now mock him as, “those whose fathers I disdained to put with the dogs of my flock. They are gaunt from want and famine, fleeing late to the wilderness, desolate and waste...” (*Iyuv* Chapter 30).

ספר איוב פרק ל פסוק ד הַקִּטְפִּים מִלוּחַ עָלֵי שִׁיחַ וְשָׂרֵשׁ רִתְמִים לְחֶמֶם:
 “They pluck mallows by the bushes and broom tree roots for their food” (*Iyuv* 30:4).

Rashi explains, “When they were in the deserts, they would pluck for themselves saltwort that grew on the trees of the forests and eat. The Hebrew word translated as mallow is מְלוּחַ/*maluach* – ‘salty,’ or ‘saltwort.’ It is the name of an herb. In Aramaic (*Pesachim* 114a), it is called קַקְוִלִין and in the language of the Mishnah מְלוּחִים (‘malves’ in French – ‘mallows,’ as we learned in (*Kidushin* 66a): ‘They brought up mallows on golden tables.’” The Hebrew word מְלוּחַ/*malûach* is from מֶלַח/*melach* – ‘salt,’ and properly refers to a marine plant or vegetable. The context of Rashi’s Talmudic quote describes how the sages of Israel ate saltwort to celebrate their military victory by commemorating the builders of the second temple who also ate this weed because they were poor.

It once happened that King Jannai went to Kohalith in the wilderness and conquered sixty towns there. On his return, he rejoiced exceedingly and invited all the Sages of Israel. He said to them, ‘Our forefathers ate mallows when they were engaged on the building of the [second] Temple; let us too eat mallows in memory of our forefathers.’ So, mallows were served on golden tables, and they ate them (*Babylonian Talmud, Kidushin* 66a).

I’m having a hard time connecting the ‘saltwort’ – מְלוּחַ/*maluach* mentioned both in the Book of *Iyuv* and in the Talmud with the mallow growing in my garden. First of all, I just took a bite of mallow to carefully examine its taste. It is mild and neutral without a trace of saltiness. Secondly, both in *Iyuv* and in the Talmud, mallow is mentioned as a plant growing in the wilderness/desert, whereas mallow grows in meadows, cultivated, fallow and waste ground, roadsides and only occasionally, on coastal rocks and sand-dunes. Other commentaries believe that the plant referred to by *Iyov* was Hallimus, or ‘saltwort’ growing commonly in deserts and poor soil, and eaten as a salad. In any case, both mallow and saltwort constitute free food for the poor. I keep telling my students that if their financial means are limited, there is enough mallow to feed everyone, providing ample vitamins and minerals free of charge. Mallow helps us feel secure in our land as it sustained the inhabitants of Jerusalem throughout the siege during Israel’s independence war.

Green Leafy Vegetables like Mallow Prevents Cognitive Decline

A recent study [published online](#) in *Neurology* reveals that eating one serving of green leafy vegetables per day may help to slow cognitive decline with aging. The rate of decline among those who consumed one to two servings per day was the equivalent of being 11 years younger, compared with those who rarely or never consumed green leafy vegetables. The folate, phyloquinone, and lutein content of green, leafy vegetables accounts for the protective effect of green leafy vegetables against cognitive decline. “Our main take-home message is that leafy greens contain so many good nutrients, several which are linked to better cognitive function, so this is a food that should definitely be a staple in everyone’s diet, particularly older

Herbal Remedies from the Judean Hills - Months of Shevat/Adar

individuals" (Martha Clare Morris, ScD, Rush University, Chicago, Illinois, *Medscape Medical News*). Not only the leaves, but every part of the mallow is medicinal or edible in some form. The leaf is most often used to treat respiratory and urinary tract ailments. The root is preferred for treating digestive tract disorders. The flowers, which can be eaten raw, or dried for later use, are harvested in the summer. You can add them to salads or use as a garnish. They make a pleasant and pretty addition to the salad bowl, with their nice mild flavor and similar texture to the leaves. Immature seeds can be eaten raw. Nibbled, they have a nice nutty flavor, but are too fiddly for most people to gather in quantity. During the summer, when the beautiful purple mallow flowers are withering, the neighborhood children eagerly pick the unripe seed-fruit, and pop them in their mouth. Hopefully, they are bug-free. The divided mallow capsule, containing a ring of nutlets actually looks like little mini breads, giving the plant its nickname לחם ערבי – 'Arabic bread,' or לחם גמדים – 'dwarf's bread.'

Hands On:

One of the most popular uses of mallows is as a salad green. Mallows are high in mucilage, a sticky substance that gives them a slightly slimy texture, similar to okra. I prefer not to eat them alone because of this, but they're great mixed with other foods in a salad. Due to their mucilage property they are also excellent in soups.

Mallow Soup (serves 6 - 8) Adapted from [Miriam Kresh, Tsfat, Israel](#)

- 1 large onion
- 1 large tomato
- 2 bell peppers, preferable of different colors
- ½ bunch of celery
- 4 carrots
- 3 large potatoes
- 3 garlic cloves
- Olive oil to cover the bottom of your soup pot
- 6 cups of water or stock enriched with 2 Tbsp. of good-quality soy sauce
- 2 tsp. salt plus black pepper to taste.
- 2 large handfuls of clean mallow leaves and/or roots

Wash the mallow thoroughly and soak it in veggie wash for three minutes in a large bowl of water. Rinse out thoroughly and drain well.

Dice the onion; chop tomato, peppers, celery, carrots and potatoes.

Sauté the onions, until golden.

Chop the garlic finely. Add to the sautéed onions when they start smelling cooked.

Add remaining vegetables including mallow roots finely sliced, and continue to sauté for another few minutes.

Add water and seasonings. Simmer for 15-20 minutes. A nice touch at this point is to blend the cooked vegetables, with some of the soup, and return the blended mass to the pot. Children especially appreciate blended soups.

Chop the mallow into narrow ribbons. Add to the pot, turn off the fire and allow the leaves to steep in the hot liquid without damaging their nutrients by cooking.

Serve with chopped parsley, or simply on its own.