

## מַרְבִּיּוֹן – White Horehound – Marrubium Vulgare

### Was Horehound One of the Bitter Herbs for the Pesach Seder?

At the edge of my garden, under the grapevine, grows a little white horehound with its small pale flowers and grey-green leaves covered with white, felted hairs, which give it a woolly appearance. I don't need much of this herb, as it's the most bitter plant I've ever tasted. Most herbalists believe that its Latin name Marrubium derives from the Hebrew מַרְוֹב/Marrob, which means (bitter juice). Its major active constituent, marrubiin, is an expectorant that gives horehound its bitter taste, stimulating the flow of saliva and gastric juices and improving digestion. Herbalists believe that this plant was one of the five bitter herbs traditionally eaten during the Pesach Seder. In the commentary of *Mishna Pesachim* 2:6, Rabbi Natan adds in his explanation of the third bitter herb בְּתִמְכָּא/*Tamcha* listed in the Mishna "and some say *marubio*" which is *marrubium vulgare* which is horehound. *Tamcha* was also defined as *marubio* by many of the *Rishonim* or early authorities such as rashi: מַרְוִי"א - תַּמְכָּא. It is difficult to imagine how the inedible leaves of horehound could ever be ingested raw like lettuce. I tend to trust Jo Ann Gardner's assessment that horehound is not among the original bitter herbs for Pesach (*Bitter Herbs: A New Look at the Plants of the Bible,* *The Herb Companion*, April/May 1990). Its name may suggest a breed of gray dog, but that's misleading. 'Hore-' means hoary (gray or white in Old English), but '-hound' is not canine. Ancient herbalists used it as an antidote for the bite of a mad dog, "for sheep or shepherd bitten by a wood-dog's venom'd tooth." (Beaumont and Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess*). Rambam calls it הַעֶשֶׂב לְכַלְבִּים/*Ha'esev L'kelavim* – 'The Weed for the Hounds,' because dogs like to pee on it. He classifies it as a warming and drying herb used to clear the lungs. Horehound is an important herb in Israeli and Arabic folk medicine. Due to its vulnerary properties, it is a remedy for open, inflamed soars. It also treats eye infections, intestinal worms, anemia and heart conditions.



### Superior Cough & Cold Remedy

Horehound is cultivated in the corners of cottage gardens for making tea and candy to treat respiratory ailments, coughs and colds. Due to its expectorant, and anti-spasmodic properties, white horehound has been used since ancient times as a remedy for upper respiratory ailments including [whooping cough](#), [asthma](#), [tuberculosis](#), [bronchitis](#), and swollen breathing passages. It is excellent for treating a non-productive cough, as it combines the action of relaxing the smooth muscles of the bronchus while expelling mucus. "Syrup made of the fresh green leaves and sugar is a most singular remedy against the cough and wheezing of the lungs ... and doth wonderfully and above credit ease such as have been long sick of any consumption of the lung" (Gerard c. 1545–1612). Culpepper also recommends it warmly in syrup "as an excellent help to evacuate tough phlegm and cold rheum from the lungs of aged persons, especially those who are asthmatic and short winded." Horehound syrup has been popular for treating children's coughs and croup for centuries. For an ordinary cold, a simple infusion is generally sufficient in itself. You can make tea from it by pouring boiling water on the fresh or dried leaves. Two or three teaspoonfuls of expressed horehound juice may also be given for severe colds. Horehound preparations are considered one of the most popular expectorants and tonics for chronic cough and asthma. The leaves are used in liqueurs, and ales, and are made into expectorant and antiseptic cough drops. They are also brewed and made into Horehound Ale, an appetizing and healthful beverage, much drunk in Norfolk and other country districts. Horehound is sometimes combined with Mullein, Hyssop, Rue, Liquorice root and Marshmallow root.

### Additional Medicinal Properties of Horehound

Digestion: Horehound affects not only the meridian of the lung but also of the liver and spleen. Therefore, it treats digestive problems, including [indigestion](#), [bloating](#), gas, diarrhea, [constipation](#), loss of appetite as well as hepatitis and other liver and gallbladder ailments. The bitter action stimulates the flow and secretion of bile from the gall-bladder, aiding digestion and acting as a liver tonic and laxative.

**Female Remedy:** As an emmenagogue, women use white horehound for painful menstrual periods. The father of medicine, the Greek physician, Hippocrates (c. 460 – c. 370 BC) mentioned it in a work on infertility in women. In the sixteenth century, Pietro Mattioli prescribed a horehound salve to increase nursing mothers' milk. The Navajo tribe give mothers horehound root before and after childbirth.

**Vermifuge:** Horehound destroys intestinal worms. Its tea was used internally and externally for parasitic worms. The powdered leaves have also been employed as a vermifuge. According to Columella, horehound is a serviceable remedy against cankerworm in trees. If it be put into fresh milk and set in a place pestered with flies, it will speedily kill them all.

**Poison Antidote:** Taken in large doses, horehound acts as a gentle purgative. Gerard recommends it to 'those that have drunk poyson or have been bitten of serpents.'

### Spiritual Properties of Horehound

Horehound increases concentration and focus while heightening intuition. Drinking its infusion (tea) clears the mind and strengthens mental powers. It helps to integrate the mind and body into the realm of the spiritual while keeping distraction at bay. As an oil, horehound is used in spiritual healing to restore lost energy. Horehound is also known for providing spiritual protection. It may keep off wild animals and packs of dogs. Although it has a curious, musky smell, which is diminished by drying, horehound can be made into a tea, which is added to floor wash to protect the home. It is supposed to be an excellent herb to use in blessing the home. Horehound flavored candy has been used to give blessings upon first-time guests.

### Hands On:

Horehound lozenges are popular to treat coughs and colds. The best way to make candied horehound is to boil down the fresh leaves of the plant until the juice is extracted. Then add sugar before boiling it again, until it becomes a thick consistency. Pour into a baking pan.

### Horehound Candy

½ cup fresh or ¼ cup dried horehound  
 3 cups boiling water  
 4 ½ cups brown sugar  
 ½ teaspoon cream of tartar (optional)

1. Boil the horehound leaves in the water for a half hour.
2. Strain and add the brown sugar.
3. Place into a cast iron pan or granite kettle with the remaining ingredients.
4. Boil until, when dripped into cold water, mixture will become brittle.
5. Pour onto a well-greased cookie sheet. When the candy is cool enough to hold its shape, mark it into squares. Alternatively, pour into a silicon baking-dish that has small candy-sized shapes.