

אוטרה – Scented Geranium – Pelargonium Graveolens

Feminine, Balancing, Heart Opening Geranium

One of my students recently asked me when we would be learning about scented geranium in Herbal Workshop, so I chose to share some insight about this flower now, although it grows throughout the year. Scented geranium, best known as rose or lemon geranium, is a favorite of mine. I use its natural essential oil as my daily perfume, for I feel that it resonates beautifully with me. This may be why women always compliment my scent when I wear pure geranium oil. Geranium is a classic remedy for those who focus so heavily on work and the logical processes of life that they lose touch with their ability to just sit and enjoy the wonders of the world. Geranium helps switching gears so we can take a moment to appreciate and smell the flowers. Workaholics and driven people like myself benefit most from a little geranium in their lives. Geranium extends its warm hand of comfort to the 'inner child' and helps open our hearts and heal the pain of repressed memories. It strengthens our feminine or 'yin' aspects and promotes a creative, receptive lifestyle. Geranium helps restore the balance of our adrenal and female hormonal systems and balances the male and female energies. By nourishing the blood and yin, geranium helps to ease conditions that lead to PMS, peri-menopause and related symptoms, as well as fatigue and energy swings. Geranium is used in dream work and astral travel. It also helps overcome depression and apprehension. I can especially relate to geranium's ability to help the mind focus at times when I feel overwhelmed with pressure and the sense of 'too much on my mind.' In the past, scented geranium was carried in small bouquets by fine ladies, used as table decorations and exchanged between lovers. They were extremely popular in Europe and North America throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. In England during the Victorian period, women with long dresses would purposely pass scented geraniums to allow their dresses to touch the plants and spread the good fragrance in the air to perfume their homes. In our time, geranium has merited a 'comeback' in popularity.



Hardy Natural Protective Insect Repellent

I treasure my scented geranium because the species in my garden is of the hardy kind that can survive our harsh winters with occasional frost. It thrives in our front yard and is often added to the myrtle as good smelling herbs for Havdalah. 'Pelargonium' derives from the Greek 'pelargos' which means stork due to the shape of their fruit. The specific epithet 'graveolens' refers to the strong-smelling leaves. The name Geranium comes from the word Greek word 'geronos' – crane bird, because its fruit looks like its beak. Scented geranium is a natural insect repellent and is well known in the ancient world as a tick repellent for dogs and humans alike! While these geraniums won't rid our gardens of mosquitoes, they can significantly reduce their numbers. Grow scented geraniums in full sun in large pots on your patio or in the earth around your porch to take full advantage of their mosquito-repelling attributes. Gently stroke their leaves to release the aromatic fragrance. The rose geranium with its highly scented leaves is used in protection sachets, and its fresh leaves are rubbed on doorknobs and windows to protect the home.

Medicinal Properties of Scented Geranium

Scented geranium is used in the treatment of fevers from influenza, inflammation of the lungs, pain and swellings of the limbs due to its analgesic; anti-inflammatory; and febrifuge properties. Steep the leaves in vinegar, when applied to scalp and forehead, they will ease headache symptoms. Geranium heals bruises, cuts and scrapes, eczema and wounds due to its vulnerary property. It's main medicinal property is astringent, making a good choice for herbal facials and baths. Pure geranium oil diluted with water is good to add to baths and use topically for cleaning the face. Due to geranium's astringent property, it alleviates hemorrhoids and varicose veins. Geranium water is wonderful to help refresh the skin of the face to prevent aging of the skin and to treat protruding blood vessels and stains on the skin. In addition to its astringent qualities, geranium also has antiseptic properties that heals skin infections, treats sunburn and sores while restoring the balance to dry or oily skin and hair. It is used as a hair rinse in order to prevent hair-loss. The soothing qualities of geranium are helpful in relieving symptoms of anxiety and insomnia, as well as PMS and menopausal symptoms. Drinking the plant as tea helps to produce milk for nursing mothers. It is said that teas can also be used for treatment of stomach ulcers.

Rose Geranium in Oriental Medicine

In Traditional Chinese Medicine, geranium is considered neutral and sweet. Its affinity is for 'wood' and 'earth' with a particular focus on the 'liver,' 'heart,' and 'spleen' meridians. This makes geranium excellent for promoting circulation, strengthening weak, thin and stagnant or slow moving blood. It also treats weakness of the spleen and restless or agitated 'shen.' The outward symptoms of those conditions are anxiety, poor concentration, pessimism, depression, insomnia, fatigue, and even chronic anger coupled with depression. From the Ayurvedic perspective, geranium essential oil helps to balance the heart energy center. It decreases *kapha* conditions (the binding nature of water energy) by moving energy, which in turn strengthens and balances both *pitta* (the transformative nature of fire energy) and *vata* (the mobile nature of wind/air energy). Most often, geranium is considered a *pitta* essential oil, meaning it has greatest affinity for cooling and calming the fires of the mind and body. Overheated conditions, especially those centered on the heart area such as in the lungs or heart, respond well to geranium's cooling nature. As a *vata* balancer, it treats energetic inflammation of the mind or air element, such as anxiety and mood swings, overthinking, and over-stimulation of the adrenal system. In Tibetan medicine, geranium root is considered acrid and sweet with a cooling potency. It was dried and powdered and put in mouth to relieve a sore mouth, especially for children.

Culinary Uses

The best thing about scented geraniums is that the leaves and flowers are edible. They can be used to flavor jellies, cakes, butters, ice creams, iced tea, sugar and more. Pound cake made with scented geranium leaves is a classic. You can try placing the leaves in the bottom of your prepared cake pan and pour the batter over the leaves, then bake as usual. For a more earthy appearance and stronger flavor grind six leaves with each cup of sugar in your pound cake recipe and then prepare as usual, without placing leaves in the bottom of the pan. Some herbal cooks keep a container of rose geranium sugar on the counter to use in desserts. You can simply layer fresh leaves with your sugar, remove the leaves after two weeks and enjoy. Whirling a leaf with sugar or honey in a blender will give you instant flavor. Scented pelargonium jelly makes a special gift. Make an apple jelly and place a rose geranium leaf in the jelly before sealing.

Hands On

Scented geraniums are more than delightful ornamentals. Their aromatic foliage, which gives scented geraniums their name, is used as stewing herbs, potpourris, in sachets, baking and teas. Scented geranium is a great addition to many herb teas. For example, a ginger scented leaf will put zing in lemon balm tea. The essential oils of the scented geraniums are used in toiletries, cosmetics and other flavor and fragrance products. Scented geranium oil is often used to supplement (or adulterate) expensive essential rose oil. It can be used internally as in gel caps, topically as a massage oil or liniment, or inhaled in an aromatherapy burner.

Rose Geranium Water

1 Handful of rose geranium

2 Cups water (clear rain-water if possible)

Simmer together for 15 minutes, steep for 2 hours, then strain.

Larger quantities, perhaps at a time when the plants are being pruned or cut back, may be made and frozen until required in freezer bags.

Use as an after-shampoo-rinse by running the water three or four times through the hair to give a pleasant fragrance and shine. Rose geranium water can also be used as a cleansing astringent for the face and neck.

Scented Geranium Tea

2 teaspoons dried or ¼ cup fresh geranium leaves.

1 cup boiling water

1. Pour boiling water over the leaves and let sit for 5 minutes.
2. Strain the leaves out and drink.

You may drink this tea or use it as a facial wash. Use with caution if you have sensitive skin, as in some people the essential oil causes mild rash.

Geranium Oil Infusion

A large amount of geranium leaves

Olive oil to fill a jar

1. Fill a jar with dried geranium leaves almost to the top.
 2. Pour in extra virgin olive oil – make sure the oil covers the herbs and goes a bit above the volume of the herbs.
 3. Place in the sun for two weeks shaking it daily.
 4. Strain out the flowers.
 5. You can store this infusion in the fridge for up to three months.
- Geraniums can be harvested for oil when the plant starts flowering.

Rose Geranium Cookies

¼ Cup olive oil
1 Cup brown sugar
1 Organic egg
½ Cup scented geranium tea
2 ½ Cup whole wheat pastry flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
About two dozen small rose geranium leaves

1. Soak rose geranium leaves 3 minutes in veggie wash.
 2. Rinse out and check each leaf carefully for bugs.
 3. Whisk oil and sugar together until smooth.
 4. Add egg and continue whisking.
 5. Mix in the flour
 7. With a spoon place cookie size balls on trays covered with baking paper. Leave enough space (2 inches) between cookies.
 8. Press a rose geranium leaf or flower well into the cookie.
 9. Bake until lightly browned, 8 to 10 minutes.
 10. Remove and cool on wire racks. Store in an airtight container.
- Makes about two dozen cookies.