

יערה – Honeysuckle – *Lonicera Japonica* & *Caprifolium*



The Hardy, Humble Honeysuckle

The sweet fragrance of honeysuckle is a clear sign of the beginning of summer. It represents rebirth and the survival of life after the long winter's death. As I went out to feed the chickens this morning, the tantalizing scent of honeysuckle that grows near our chicken coop welcomed me. The flowers gathered at the end of their stems trumpeted the sweet, gentle scent of purification and renewal. I delight in the Divine providence that brought us to plant honeysuckle on both sides of our chicken coop. What could be a more suitable plant for dispelling the less than pleasant odor of molding kitchen scraps mixed with chicken droppings? Although, there are approximately 200 honeysuckle species from the *Lonicera* genus of the *Caprifoliaceae* family growing worldwide, I don't recall ever meeting honeysuckle in my native country, Denmark. Honeysuckle is usually found in more temperate climates, as well as in the Himalayas and southern Asia. Its floral aroma is a popular scent in perfumes. Honeysuckle is a hardy, twining climber. I love its strength and resilience. It easily survives the harsh winters of the Judean hills and in a short time, it covered our unsightly retaining cement wall with its profuse tubular summer flowers exuding their intense fragrance. Honeysuckle is known as 'love bind' due to its clinging growing habits that symbolize a lover's embrace. Thus, honeysuckle's 'bonds of love' are believed to strengthen fidelity in marriage. It certainly is a faithful plant returning in full bloom each summer. This explains the superstitious belief that if you bring honeysuckle bloom into the house, a wedding will follow within the year. Perhaps because of the potent fragrance of its flowers, it was believed to induce dreams of love and passion. Honeysuckle has also been used as incense since ancient times to attract financial blessings and promote prosperity. The sweet scent of honeysuckle may trigger generosity by sweetening the thoughts of those who smell it. The name יערה/Ya'ara – honeysuckle was the name of King Achaz's daughter (I *Chronicles* 9:42). It is one of the lesser-known Hebrew girl's names.

Increasing Psychic Abilities

The sweet scent of honeysuckle clears the mind and strengthens psychic powers. It can sharpen intuition when used as a plant, when burned as incense or when dried and placed around the room in sachets. Some believe that crushing and placing honeysuckle flowers next to the forehead or lightly bruising the flowers and then rubbing them on the forehead boosts the psychic powers within the mind. You can also gather a few honeysuckle blossoms with their green leaves to carry with you or place into a tiny vase at your home or at your desk at work.

According to the Zohar, fragrance has the power to strengthen the soul – the source of our psychic abilities: "Through this fragrance, the soul is restored from its weakness. It is restored through this *emunah* (faith) and draws down blessings from above to below" (*Zohar* 3:35a). Fragrance connects the soul to the Divine. Through scent, we can learn to recognize and smell G-d's imprint within the world. The sages smell the wisdom of G-d's scent that imbues all existence (Malbim, *Song of Songs* 1:3). The Hebrew word יערה/ye'ara with the same letters of the Hebrew word for honeysuckle יערה/ya'ara means to 'pour out.' Incidentally, this word is used to describe how Hashem pours out His Divine Spirit upon us. Just as when the fragrance of honeysuckle is poured over us, it strengthens our psychic abilities, likewise Hashem will pour His Spirit upon us to open our spiritual intuition:

ספר ישעיה פרק לב פסוק טו עד יערה עלינו ריח ממרום והיה מדבר לפרמל ופרמל ליהפךמל ליער יחשב:
 “Until a spirit be poured (יערה/ye’ara) upon us from on high, and the desert shall become a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be regarded as a forest” (Yesha’yahu 32:15).

This verse paints a prophetic picture of the redemption, when the world will evolve to become Paradise. Our hearts will be opened and in tune with Hashem. As we move forward in the redemption process, we experience how increasingly more of us are strengthening our spiritual intuition while simultaneously becoming aware of the fragrances Hashem has poured into reality. The scent of honeysuckle is one of these strong aromatic hints of our future redemption.

Medicinal Properties of Honeysuckle

Honeysuckle is high in calcium, magnesium, zinc and potassium. The whole plant is anti-inflammatory, astringent, anti-bacterial, diuretic, calming, expectorant and antispasmodic.

It is mainly used to reduce inflammation and infection. It treats upper respiratory tract infections including the common cold; sore throats; influenza; flu and pneumonia; whether viral or bacterial infections. It also treats swelling of the brain (encephalitis); boils; and sores. Honeysuckle is moreover beneficial for digestive disorders including pain and inflammation of the small intestine (enteritis). It also treats urinary disorders, headache, diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, ulcers, and cancer. The stems can be boiled into soup for treating acute arthritis, hepatitis and mumps. Honeysuckle is sometimes applied to the skin for inflammation and itching, and to kill germs. In folk medicine, honeysuckle is a remedy against kidney stones and liver diseases. The Roman naturalist writer Pliny recommended it mixed with wine for the treatment of disorders of the spleen. In ancient Greek humoral medicine, the spleen is associated with the black bile humor, which in turn is associated with melancholy, or depression. Today, honeysuckle is not used to treat depression except the Italian honeysuckle, which is used as a Bach flower remedy, where it treats the kind of depression associated with nostalgia. The Italian honeysuckle (*Lonicera caprifolium*) fruit is emetic, diuretic and cathartic. The pressed juice makes a mild purgative. The leaves and flowers are antispasmodic, emollient and expectorant. They are used as a skin and mucous tonic and as a vulnerary. Recent research has shown that the plant has an outstanding curative action in cases of colitis. The Roman naturalist writer Pliny recommended it mixed with wine for the treatment of disorders of the spleen. In ancient Greek humoral medicine, the spleen is associated with the black bile humor, which in turn is associated with melancholy, or depression. Today, the Italian honeysuckle, used as a Bach flower remedy, is used to treat the kind of depression associated with nostalgia.

Honeysuckle in Traditional Chinese Medicine

Among species of honeysuckle, the most common, in Israel, is Italian (*Lonicera caprifolium*) and Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*). The former has reddish flowers, whereas the Japanese honeysuckle, which is used in traditional Chinese medicine, has yellow flowers. It is considered a powerful herbal antibiotic, effective against a broad spectrum of bacteria and viruses. It has sweet and cold properties, and is associated with the lung, stomach and large intestine meridians. With its powerful antibiotic, antiviral, anti-inflammatory and anticancer properties, it is used to clear heat and remove toxins. According to Chen and Chen (*Chinese Medical Herbology and Pharmacology, 2004, Art of Medicine Press Inc.*), the fresh herb soaked in water has a stronger antibiotic effect than an herbal decoction, and the leaves have even stronger antibiotic properties than the flowers. Honeysuckle flowers may be applied internally or externally. For upper respiratory tract and skin problems, mix the leaves, stems and flower buds. Cook as medicinal herb tea. The flower is edible and can be infused as herbal tea or made into a natural cough syrup as an expectorant for bad coughs and asthma.

Bach Flower Remedy

Italian Honeysuckle is used as a Bach flower remedy to treat nostalgia, homesickness and for people who live in the past instead of the present. They feel that their best days are behind them and that there is little to look forward to. As a consequence, they prefer to dwell on past happiness. Dr. Bach' described them thus "Those who live much in the past, perhaps a time of great happiness, or memories of a lost friend, or ambitions which have not come true. They do not expect further happiness such as they have had" - The Twelve Healers and Other Remedies. The negative honeysuckle state keeps a person 'stuck' in the past – unable and unwilling to accept the changes of his or her present life, and expecting nothing good to come from the future. These are the people for whom the past was better than the present, and they want desperately to hang on to it. They cannot learn from the experiences of the past nor can they integrate those experiences into the present. In a positive honeysuckle state, they learn to connect to the past and learn from it. Writers who bring back the past for our enjoyment are living in a positive honeysuckle state.

Hands On

Honeysuckle has been used medicinally by the Chinese for thousands of years. Although, I hate picking off the fragile flowers since I adore their delicate scent in my garden their nectar is sweeter than honey and their flavor in tea is surprisingly potent.

Honeysuckle Iced Tea

2 cups honeysuckle blossoms

A few fresh mint sprigs for garnish

1. Pluck the blossoms from the honeysuckle vine. Discard any leaves or green parts. Try to take the freshly opened flowers, and even the buds that are about to open.
2. Place the flowers in a pitcher or Mason jar.
3. Cover with about 2½ cups water that has been heated to just boiling.
4. Give it a good stir and let steep at room temperature for several hours. Then refrigerate overnight.
5. Strain the tea through a fine mesh strainer, cheesecloth, or a coffee filter. It will yield a crystal-clear tea.
6. Serve cold over ice with a mint sprig and a few blossoms for garnish.

The finished tea has a lovely pale celadon color, a light floral scent, and a surprisingly sweet flavor. Don't add honey before tasting your tea – it's incredibly sweet all by itself. You might want a squeeze of lemon if you don't like sweet tea.

Honeysuckle Ice Cream

1½ cups heavy cream

1 cup whole milk

½ cup brown sugar

2 cups honeysuckle blossoms (approximately)

Seeds from 1 vanilla bean or a few drops of natural vanilla essence

1. Put the cream, milk and sugar into a medium saucepan and stir to dissolve the sugar.
2. Add the honeysuckle blossoms into the pan and bring the mixture to a simmer over medium heat, stirring occasionally.

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3. Turn off the heat and let the mixture cool to room temperature. Then cover and refrigerate overnight.
4. In the morning, strain the blossoms out and add the vanilla bean seeds. Mix well to break apart any clumped seeds.
5. Process the cold mixture in your ice cream machine according to its directions.
6. Put the soft ice cream in the freezer to firm up before serving.

Chana Bracha's Honeysuckle Sorbet (Vegan Option)

- 2 handfuls honeysuckle blossoms
- 3 cups coconut cream
- ¼ Cup water – just enough to cover the blossoms
- ¼ cup honey
- A few drops of natural vanilla essence

1. Boil the water and pour over the honeysuckle blossoms
2. Let the blossoms steep until cool, then refrigerate overnight
3. Strain the honeysuckle blossoms and pour the tea into your blender
4. Add the remaining ingredients into your blender
5. Process on high speed until completely smooth and place in freezer
6. Remove from freezer about 30 minutes before serving