Interesting Facts About Peppermint

Courtesy of: NOURISH by WebMD

The Peppermint is a hybrid of two plants in the mint family: watermint and spearmint. It is originally from Europe, but grown and sold all over the world.

Pliny notes in his writings that it was used by the Greeks and Romans to decorate and scent banquet tables as well as an ingredient in some sauces and wine preparations.

Peppermint has been used in Eastern and Western traditional medicine as an aromatic, antispasmodic, and antiseptic in treating indigestion, nausea, sore throat, colds, toothaches, cramps, and cancers. Ancient Greeks believed mint could cure hiccups.

Carolus Linnaeus first described the plant in 1753, from samples that had been collected in England.

Peppermint oil is produced by specialized cells on the underside of the leaves. The best time to harvest and collect the oil is on a sunny day as flowering is just beginning. This is when menthol is at its peak.

Peppermint is the most extensively used volatile oil, both commercially and medicinally. Peppermint oil comes in capsules and liquids. You can apply it to your skin or take it by mouth. It's highly concentrated, so only use it in a diluted form or a few drops at a time. It can be toxic to take a lot of the oil at once.

Commercial production is believed to have made its way to the United States in the early 1800's in Wayne County New York. Soon after production of oil spread to Michigan and by 1920 Michigan had become the hub of true mint oil distillation producing nearly 90% of the world's supply at that time.

Fresh or dried peppermint leaves are often used alone in peppermint tea or with other herbs in herbal teas (tisanes, infusions). Peppermint is used for flavoring ice cream, candy, fruit preserves, alcoholic beverages, chewing gum, toothpaste, and some shampoos, soaps and skin care products.

Menthol activates cold-sensitive TRPM8 receptors in the skin and mucosal tissues, and is the primary source of the cooling sensation that follows the topical application of peppermint oil.

Peppermint has compounds that relax the tissues in animals' GI tracts. Research shows it may also help relieve nausea and vomiting from chemotherapy. Studies also suggest that coated peppermint oil capsules can ease side effects of irritable bowel syndrome like gas, stomach pain, constipation, and diarrhea.

The active ingredient in peppermint is menthol. Some small studies show it can lessen the pain of migraine headaches. It may also reduce other symptoms like light sensitivity, nausea, and vomiting.

Not only does the flavor of peppermint freshen your breath, but its antibacterial properties may also help get rid of the source of the smell: germs. It's believed to keep bacteria from forming a film on your teeth, which helps keep your pearly whites healthy.

Scientists tested peppermint oil on bacteria like *E. coli,* listeria, and salmonella. They found that it can stop all three from growing. It can also kill *Staphylococcus aureus*, a bacteria that causes skin infections, pneumonia, meningitis, and more. Peppermint's antimicrobial powers may help you fight off the common cold or the infected mucus that sets up shop in your sinuses as a result. The menthol can also make you feel that you can breathe more easily.

Peppermint can help you enjoy the outdoors more when it's allergy season. It has a compound called rosmarinic acid that can lower your body's histamine reaction. This may mean fewer symptoms like an irritated, stuffy nose, sneezing, and red, itchy eyes.



I like my candy canes and peppermints in mint condition.



Peppermint Meltaway Cookies

Total Time: Prep: 30 min. + chilling Bake: 10 min./batch + cooling

Makes: about 2-1/2 dozen

Ingredients

1 cup butter, softened

1/2 cup confectioners' sugar

1/2 teaspoon peppermint extract

1-1/4 cups all-purpose flour

1/2 cup cornstarch

FROSTING:

2 tablespoons butter, softened

2 tablespoons 2% milk

1/4 teaspoon peppermint extract

2 to 3 drops red food coloring, optional

1-1/2 cups confectioners' sugar

1/2 cup crushed peppermint candies

Directions

In a small bowl, cream butter and confectioners' sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in extract. In another bowl, whisk flour and cornstarch; gradually beat into creamed mixture. Refrigerate, covered, 30 minutes or until firm enough to handle.

Preheat oven to 350°. Shape dough into 1-in. balls; place 2 in. apart on ungreased baking sheets. Bake 9-11 minutes or until bottoms are light brown. Remove from pans to wire racks to cool completely.

In a small bowl, beat butter until creamy. Beat in milk, extract and, if desired, food coloring. Gradually beat in confectioners' sugar until smooth. Spread over cookies; sprinkle with crushed candies. Store in an airtight container.

Test Kitchen Tips

Cornstarch in cookies? Its inclusion lends these shortbread cookies a lovely tenderness.

These also would taste great with almond or vanilla extract instead of peppermint, and topped with toasted nuts.