

1880 High Desert Homestead Ranch
Healing Plants

Chamomile

Anthemis nobilis

Traditionally used since ancient times to ease upset stomach, colds, fever, toothaches, earaches and rheumatism. Sometimes drunk as a tea or used as a poultice. In the 1880s it was mixed with laudanum to cure ulcers. The tea can also repel insects when wiped on the skin.

Feverfew

Chrysanthemum parthenium

With its reputation for eliminating fever this was a popular medicinal plant. It was also applied as an insecticide. Originally brought to the new world during colonial times from Great Britain where it is a native species.

Lavender

Lavendula officinalis

Sweet smelling with purple blossoms this is one of the most common herbs of medicinal and culinary gardens. The dried flowers were used to freshen linens and during the Elizabethan era the oil was pressed from the plant and administered for headaches. By the late colonial period it was thought to counteract a woman's tendency to swoon.

Nasturtium

Tropaeolum

Brought to North America in the late 16th century this edible flower was considered a powerful antiseptic and counteracted scurvy.

Spearmint

Mentha spicata

Besides a culinary flavoring, Mint family of plants was thought to elevate digestive gas. It was so popular that many cocktails, after dinner drinks and teas were used by pioneers to aid in digestion.

Wild Mint plants were used as a cold remedy by native people when drunk as a tea due to its high content of ascorbic acid (Vitamin C).

Balm/Lemon Balm

Melissa officinalis

Another ancient herb, this was common in historic herb gardens. It was used to soothe menstrual cramps, fever and contains a mild sedative. The leaves crushed would relieve stings and bite wounds. Also drunk as a tea like beverage.

Yarrow

Achillea millefolium

Originally grown in ancient Europe this is yet another healing plant brought to the New World during the early colonial period. Steeping the leaves in wine was used to relieve measles and chicken pox. As an oral medicine, it was used to relieve toothaches and migraines when chewed like tobacco. A wedded couple with a bouquet of flowers containing Yarrow were said to have 7 years of bliss.

Native populations adopted this plant and ground it and applied it as a poultice to fight serious infection.

Wild Rose

Rosa nutkana & Rosa spaldingii

Pioneer Gardens often relied on wild varieties of familiar plants to beautify their gardens. Wild roses grew along water sheds and when transplanted, could be used just as their native neighbors would have or their European kin back home in the east. Rose hips are full of ascorbic acid (Vitamin C) and the flower petals could be brewed into a tea for both their scent and flavor. Native peoples often used the tea as a holy water and for food and materials for infant cradle boards.

Sources:

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