

Savory



Satureia hortensis

Tiny Banquett Committee 7/31/06

Botanical Description

There are two main varieties of this herb. Winter savory is a perennial and generally more hardy than its annual counterpart, Summer savory.

Summer savory has leaves that contain oil glands. The leaves are also more rounded and larger than those of Winter savory. It smells like a combination of mint and thyme.ⁱ Summer savory grows to be about a 12-18 inches high, flowering in mid to late summer. The flowers are small white or lilac in color.ⁱⁱ

Winter savory has spicy flavored leaves that have a tougher texture than Summer savory.ⁱ It has a woody base and flowers in late June through September. The flowers are light purple.ⁱⁱⁱ

With both plants the leaves are used and can be dried or used fresh. To dry the leaves for winter, pull up after they flower. Both herbs are thought to be among the most fragrant herbs and were therefore planted near beehives.ⁱⁱ

Cultivation

Summer savory

Seeds should be planted in April approximately 9 inches apart. Summer savory prefers rich soil in a sunny spot. Leaves can be cut in early June for fresh use.ⁱⁱ

Winter savory

Seeds can be planted in same manner as Summer savory except in poor, stony soil. Winter savory is much more like a shrub than Summer savory. Side shoots can be cut starting in June.ⁱⁱⁱ

Origin

Savory's Latin name, *Satureja* comes from the Roman word for "satyr," which was a half-man, half-goat in ancient Roman mythology.^{iv} Summer savory like Winter savory, originated in the Mediterranean.ⁱⁱ In German, *Bohenkraut* is the word for savory meaning bean-herb because of its use in flavoring beans and meats.^v

History

Since the savories belonged to the satyrs, many Romans used savory like mint in cooking especially as a flavoring in vinegar. Under Caesar's rule, the Romans introduced savory to England for its culinary and medicinal uses^{iv}

In Shakespearean times, the herb was mentioned in conjunction with mint, lavender and marjoram for its appealing smell. In medieval times, many used the herb in dishes for its "peppery" taste and aroma.^v It was also commonly found in English gardens.ⁱⁱⁱ

Early Colonists in the Americas brought savory from Europe for its usefulness in treating indigestion.^{iv}

Uses

Culinary

Summer savory's aromatic taste is similar to thyme and oregano and used in similar ways. It is best used in pungent meats like mutton and also with lighter dishes containing poultry. The herb is also used with beans and legumes.^{vi} In 1830, Lydia Maria Francis Child, compiled a cookbook, *The Frugal Housewife* reflecting her New England heritage. She includes a recipe for preparing mutton, a dish eaten in the early 19th century. Since mutton has a strong taste, she advises soaking the six to seven pounds of the meat in water for an hour before cooking. She then explains how to boil the meat for about one hour, thickening the remaining juices to make a broth served with rice. To savor the dish, she advises adding a little salt and pepper with the dried summer savory plant rubbed through a sieve and placed in the pot.^{vii}

Like summer savory, winter savory has a deep aromatic flavor, but is more pungent. It too is often an accompaniment to strong-flavored meats.^{vi} It was often used dried or in powdered form mixed with breadcrumbs for meat or fish like trout.ⁱⁱⁱ Sarah Josepha

Hale, a pronounced novelist, playwright, etiquette author, and most notably cookbook author of the 19th Century wrote, *The Good Housekeeper*, which contains dishes focused on healthy eating. She includes a recipe for stewed duck. After browning the quartered duck and adding gravy, she also advises the adding of onion, pepper, salt, parsley, sage leaves, and lastly a sprig of winter savory for its distinct flavor.^{viii}

Medicinal

While summer savory was used in various remedies, winter savory was not commonly used medicinally. It was used in many forms. summer savory was sought for its soothing aromatic qualities, cure flatulence and colic. Culpepper advised its use infused in liquid.ⁱⁱⁱ He notes, “The juice dropped into the eyes removes dimness of sight if it proceed from thin humors distilled from the brain. The juice heated with oil of Roses and dropped in the ears removes noise and singing and deafness.”

In yet another form of the herb, Crescentius advised using the herb on the skin to bleach tanned complexions.^v Virgil found Savoy’s use to ward of bees and recommended the planting of the herb around beehives.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ Ortiz, Elisabeth L., ed. The Encyclopedia of Herbs, Spices, and Flavorings. New York: DK, 1996.

ⁱⁱ Grieve, M. "A Modern Herbal-Savory, Summer." A Modern Herbal. 11 Mar. 2008 <<http://botanical.com/botanical/mgmh/s/savsum24.html>>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Grieve, M. "A Modern Herbal-Savory, Winter." Botanical.Com-a Modern Herbal. 11 Mar. 2008 <<http://botanical.com/botanical/mgmh/s/savwin25.html>>.

^{iv} Kowalchik, Claire & Hylton, William H. (1987). Savory. In *Rodale’s Illustrated Encyclopedia of Herbs* (p. 452). Washington D.C: Rodale Press, Inc.

^v Freeman, Margaret B. *Herbs for the Medieval Household*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art: New York, 1943.

^{vi} Allen, Gary. The Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

^{vii} Child, Lydia Maria Francis. “The Frugal Housewife.” The American Cookbook Project 13 March 2008

<http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/cookbooks/display.cfm?TitleNo=3&PageNum=60>.

^{viii} Hale, Sarah Josphana Buell Hale. “The Good Housekeeper.” The Historic American Cookbook Project 13 March 2008

http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/cookbooks/html/books/book_11.cfm>