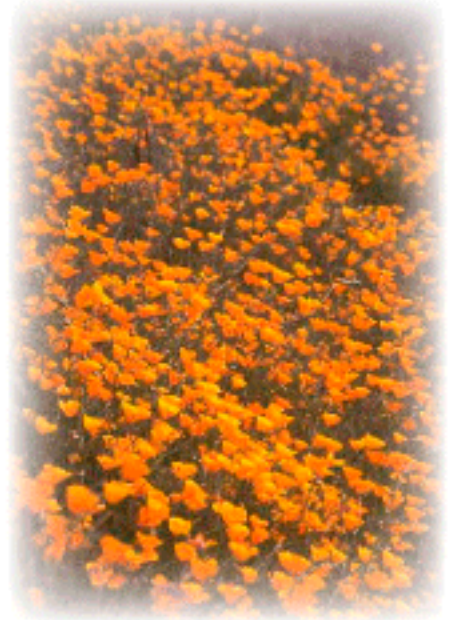


HERB OF THE MONTH: CALIFORNIA POPPY

This spring in West Marin the wild flowers have grown so abundantly and beautifully they inspired us to write about one in particular; California Poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*). California Poppy or Cup of Gold, as it is locally called, is an upright, compact annual native to California and the southwestern states. It is extremely drought tolerant and ideal for arid environments. Its height can reach up to 18 inches. The vibrant velvety golden-orange flower petals arrange themselves in a delightful cup shape. Each flower averages 2-4 inches in diameter and solitarily rests on top of a slender green stalk with gray-green leaves.



The blooming period for this poppy generally is April-August and each night or in overcast weather these brilliant flowers close waiting for the sun to show their full glory. On December 12, 1890, the *California State Floral Society* cast their votes to designate an official flower for California. The California poppy won the esteemed title of “Official California State Flower” by an overwhelming landslide and remains the state flower to this day.

This delightful wild and garden plant is actually powerful medicine. Originally used by Native Americans, it is distantly related to opium poppies, and contains isoquinoline alkaloids, which are known to have pain-relieving properties. Native people ate the leaves boiled or roasted on hot stones and also the aerial parts were used for their tranquilizing effect, particularly for toothache. Other active constituents include opiate alkaloids (completely free of toxicity), chelerythrine alkaloids, flavone glycosides and zinc. The whole plant oxygenates the circulatory system and helps the body absorb vitamin A. In European communities, it is given for hyperactivity, sleeplessness and coughs for children and is included in preparations for insomnia for adults. The German Commission E (an expert committee established by the German government in 1978 to evaluate the safety and efficacy of herbs and herbal combinations) lists California poppy as an antispasmodic and sedative. California poppy is relaxing, so it works well in cases of pain with anxiety. A 1991 animal study in France showed a definite anti-anxiety effect with small doses and with a higher dose sedative results were also found. A key alkaloid (chelerythrine) inhibits a body protein (kinase C) that contributes to persistent pain. Having analgesic properties, this herb is also used both internally and externally to alleviate inflammatory and arthritic pain. Flower Essence Society (similar to Bach Flower remedies) uses this flower to alleviate spiritual & emotional issues. FES says the California Poppy remedy is useful for people with the imbalance of seeking spiritual guidance outside of themselves while negating their own inner light. It positively reinforces spiritual seekers in finding spirituality within their own heart. The FES Repertory book also claims California Poppy to be helpful in developing an inner center of knowing. This herb can be found in our department in liquid extract form, as an FES remedy, and also in herbal formulations in our pain relief section. Because of its relaxing qualities, please use wisely and follow the directions provided on the products. Enjoy the next few months of the blossoms; it is visual medicine for the heart.