

Herb of the Month: Aloe Vera

□ Aloe Vera has been a very important plant used in folk medicine. Native to Northern Africa and Spain, this plant now also grows in the hot, dry regions of Asia, Europe and America. There are over 240 species of Aloe. However, only a few have medicinal value, the most potent of which is *Aloe barbadensis* from the *Aloeaceae* family.

□ The aloe plant has a range in size from one-inch miniatures to massive plant colonies consisting of hundreds of 2-foot diameter plants. Because Aloe consists of 96% water, they are extremely frost tender. If they are grown outdoors in warm climates, they should be planted in full sun or light shade; or in pots moving indoors in the winter. The soil should be moderately fertile, and fast draining. Aloe vera is a succulent perennial with numerous fleshy, spiny-toothed leaves, broad at the base and pointed at the tips. Its brightly colored red or yellow flowers tend to bloom in erect, tall, spindly spikes, a favorite of hummingbirds. The Aloe vera plant requires a couple years of growth before the gel in the leaf can be harvested.

□ The Egyptians referred to aloe as the “plant of immortality” and included it among the after-life gifts buried with the immortal because of its ability to grow on rocks and cliffs. Prized for its ability to soothe and heal the skin, it was also used in the ancient Greek physician Dioscorides’ internal and external issues. In Ayurvedic Medicine as well as Traditional Chinese Medicine. These ancient cultures recognized the healing benefits of Aloe vera. In India, Aloe vera, or Ghrith Kumari (meaning women’s decoction in Sanskrit) was used as a



pharaohs. It also was called the “plant of immortality” because it could live and bloom without soil. It was also used in the baths of Egyptian queens. Dioscorides used aloe gel for internal and external issues and it was also used in Indian Ayurvedic Medicine, Aloe vera (meaning women’s decoction in Sanskrit) was used as a laxative, as well as to improve

appetite and digestion, promote menstrual flow, help with menopausal issues, and destroy and expel intestinal worms. It is traditionally used to heal wounds, relieve itching and swelling, and is known for its anti-inflammatory, anti-tumor and antibacterial properties.

□ In Western herbal medicine, aloe gel is used topically to treat burns, abrasions, bruises, cuts, and may be effective in treating herpes simplex and psoriasis. Internally, aloe gel is beneficial for healing gastric and mouth ulcers, and may be beneficial in lowering blood glucose in diabetic patients and reducing blood lipid levels in patients with hyperlipidemia (high levels of fats in the blood). Also it is beneficial in the treatment of asthma, and potentially useful in treating cancer and AIDS. Clinical trials are in progress to obtain conclusive evidence for the use of aloe in the treatment of arthritis, cancer, AIDS, gastric ulcer, and colitis.

□ Aloe is shown to increase collagen and elastin formation, which may reduce wrinkling, aid in wound healing, and protect against damage from ultraviolet rays. Aloe Vera is rich in many nutrients including Vitamin A, C, and E and trace amounts of B12, enzymes, calcium, sodium, potassium, magnesium, copper, zinc, chromium, selenium, sponins, and 7 of the 8 essential amino acids. It also contains mono-polysaccharides which help the immune system and help to detoxify. It has a cool nature and is considered to be bitter in flavor.

□ Aloe Vera is available in many different forms here at the Good Earth: juice, gel, capsules, and tabs. Include this herb in your Summer fun!!

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