

## **Yarrow (*Achillea Millefolium*) as Medicine**

**Yarrow**—Technically known as *Achillea Millefolium*, is native to the Northern Hemisphere, and has commonly also been called “Nosebleed Plant,” “Old Man’s Pepper,” “Devil’s Nettle” or, “Thousand-leaf.” In Spanish-speaking New Mexico and southern Colorado, it is called Plumajillo, or “little feather,” for the shape of the leaves. It is probably the most useful and versatile of the medicinal plants.

Yarrow is used as an analgesic and antiseptic, because it stops bleeding, lessens pain, prevents infections. All of the parts of Yarrow are used therapeutically, separately or together, fresh, dried, as teas, poultices, spit poultices, steamed vapours, tinctures, oils, and vinegars.

Yarrow was known as the Soldier’s Woundwort and *Herbe Militaris* for thousands of years, because it can staunch the flow of blood from wounds it was used to pack wounds as a functional antiseptic and, hemostatic material this latter attribute is especially important in combat where bleeding to death is a constant risk. The leaves also have a strong analgesic effect so they are also used to lessen pain sensations.



In Manitoba the Anishinaabe use the oil from Yarrow leaves to treat wasp bites, and the leaves are burned in smudges to repel mosquitoes. Because of its clotting properties Yarrow leaves are used for nosebleeds. Fresh young basal rosette leaves or young flower tops are crushed or chewed into a poultice or spit poultice respectively and applied directly into and/or around wounds and wrapped if possible to staunch bleeding. The Flathead Indians of Montana rubbed the flower heads in their armpits as a deodorant. The Okanagan people placed the leaves on hot coals to make a smudge for repelling mosquitoes. The Thompson Natives boiled roots and leaves and used the roots for

bathing arthritic limbs. The roots were pounded and used as a poultice on the skin for sciatica. Root infusions were used to treat colds and venereal diseases. The mashed root was placed over a tooth for toothache. The whole plant including roots is boiled and the decoction drunk as a tonic or remedy for slight indisposition or general out-of-sorts feeling. This decoction was used as eyewash for sore eyes, and used on chapped or cracked hands, pimples, skin rashes, and insect and snake bites.

Yarrow has been traditionally used as a medicine, for its astringent effects. Decoctions have been used to treat inflammation, hemorrhoids, headache, colds, flu, stomach ache, digestive, and urinary systems. In the nineteenth century, Yarrow was said to have a greater number of indications than any other herb. The flowers were often steamed and inhaled to treat hay fever and asthma and in teas for respiratory problems, as a wash for eczema and other skin conditions; and in chest rubs for cold, flu, and inflamed joints.

To make an extremely useful topical styptic, which can be applied directly onto shallow wounds such as scrapes, popped blisters, or burns, where the skin was not broken and only clear serum is oozing out. One should use fresh or dried Yarrow leaves: first remove the finely branched portions of the leaves from the central petiole/midrib. Discard the petiole and crush or grind the fresh or dried remainder and apply directly to wounds. Strong solid scabs usually form as the serum and Yarrow bits mix as cement and rebar, and dry to close the wound. Healing seems accelerated by topical Yarrow dressings and poultices. A jar of dried and powdered Yarrow leaves can be kept for first aid treatment of open wounds and popped blisters, mat/floor burns, and shallow shaving wounds. This medicine keeps well in airtight, dark containers for at least five years with no apparent loss of healing efficacy.

Treatment summary:

- The Cree names for this plant translate as “head medicine” or “bone medicine.” Yarrow root, mixed with other plants was rubbed on aching bones or swellings to relieve the pain.
- The flowers and leaves of the Yarrow plant are burned and the smoke is inhaled to treat headaches.
- A tea made from the flowers is good for clearing mucous discharge from the bladder and will produce perspiration by opening the pores.
- Mixed with other plants it is rubbed on aching bones or swellings to relieve the pain.
- To treat headaches, the leaves and flowers can be dried and placed in the nostrils.
- Fresh flowers can be chewed and the paste applied to stings, cuts and sores.
- The flower decoction can be drunk to relieve menstrual cramps or heavy menstruation.



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