

Calendula officinalis

The golden flowers of calendula are a favorite amongst herbalists and gardeners alike. This time of year many of us are growing this delightful plant. It is a perennial in the Sacramento area and foothills and readily reseeds itself.

In a 12th century herbal, it states that by simply looking at the plant it will improve eyesight, clear the head and encourage cheerfulness. In the 16th century herbal by Culpepper, he states that calendula will "strengthen the heart." I don't know if any of this is true, but I do know that calendula's bright countenance certainly does bring a sense of cheerfulness to the spirit, which may in turn affect our heart, head and eyes.

Calendula's character can be described as slightly bitter, pungent, drying and neither too cooling nor warming but neutral. The part that is used most often is the yellow or orange petals, but many people also utilize the whole flower head.

Calendula's herbal actions are many. It is astringent, which means that it will tighten the skin and organs so that they heal better. It is also antiseptic and anti-fungal so it can be used on wounds to keep them clean and thus heal better. It is also a vulnerary, which means that it will help promote tissue rejuvenation when there have been operations, accidents and other causes of wounds.

In my herbal practice I use calendula for a wide range of skin problems and inflammations such as dry skin, wounds, dry eczema, scalds, sunburn, and other sore skin problems. Many commercial beauty products are being created these days such as calendula soap, creams and salves which may help with these conditions. I have also used calendula to help ease chicken pox and measles. For this purpose, I make a strong infusion by steeping about two ounces of calendula flowers in two quarts of boiling water for 15 minutes. I strain it and then pour the "herbal tea" in the bath water. The ill person can then soak in the healing waters as often as needed.

Aside from skin and tissue healing, calendula also helps to relieve stagnant liver problems which may show up as sluggish digestion or painful menstruation. For these conditions, tea, capsules or tincture may be helpful.

Caution: Many people call calendula "pot marigold" but do not confuse this plant with the plant French marigold and its related species (*Tagetes* species). These plants are used for warts and also as insecticides or weed killers.

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