

HAWTHORN

SCIENTIFIC NAME

Crataegus monogyna

COMMON NAMES

Common hawthorn
Mayblossom
Whitethorn
Quickthorn

FAMILY

Rose family (*Rosaceae*)

SPECIES

It is estimated that there are over 200 species of hawthorn. The common ones used in herbal medicine are

Crataegus monogyna
and *C. laevigata*

MEDICINAL PARTS

Flowering tops and berries

HABITAT

In hedgerows or as a small tree.

NATURAL RANGE

Europe to Caucasus,
North Africa to Iraq.
Introduced elsewhere.

HARVEST

Gather the flowering tops on a sunny day in the late spring or early summer, and the berries when they are ripe in the autumn.

Dry them in thin layers in the shade. Store in a dry place, in a paper bag, or in a shoe box, to prevent them from going mouldy.

DOSE

Leaves and flowers:
1-2 tsp to 1 cup of boiling water.

Infuse for 5 minutes.

Berries: 1-2 tsp to 1 cup of boiling water.
Infuse for 15 mins.
Max 3 cups per day.

Common hawthorn has white flowers and is widely seen flowering in British hedgerows in May. Many different species and cultivars can be found in ornamental gardens and as trees in parks and streets, sometimes with red flowers.

Young hawthorn leaves have a rich nutty flavour and can be eaten straight from the tree or in salads. The flowers and buds look lovely sprinkled on salads and can be used to make a tea.

Ecology and folklore

Hawthorns provide food and shelter for many birds and animals. The flowers are important to nectar-feeding insects, and the berries provide nourishment for wildlife in winter, particularly to thrushes and waxwings. Hawthorn is used as a hedge plant and is valued in water conservation landscapes, and it is often found growing next to holy wells.

The Scottish saying "Ne'er cast a clout til Mey's oot" warns us not to shed any clothes before the hawthorn blossoms and heralds the arrival of milder summer weather. In ancient times, the blossom was used to decorate Mayday festivities.

Hawthorn is seen as the emblem of hope and was used by the ancient Greeks in wedding celebrations. It is also said to heal a broken heart. In Gaelic tradition, hawthorn marks the entrance to the unseen world and is strongly associated with fairies.

Medicinal use

The flowering tops and the berries are used in herbal medicine as a heart and circulatory tonic to help improve blood flow, and as part of a treatment regime for high blood pressure.

Hawthorn is known to strengthen heart muscle function and improve cardiovascular performance without increasing pulse rate or raising blood pressure. Some athletes use it to improve exercise tolerance and lower blood pressure and heart rate during exercise.

Hawthorn also has a traditional use as a calming and reassuring nerve tonic to aid sleep and relaxation.

Warning: Hawthorn overdose can cause low blood pressure, nausea and sedation. There may also be an additive effect with hypotensive medication.

This factsheet is intended to provide educational information. It is not intended to take the place of a personal medical consultation, diagnosis, or medical treatment from a trained health professional.

For more information about medicinal herbs, please follow this [link](#) where you will also find a list of references and further reading.

