



## Feverfew *Tanacetum parthenium*



**Family** Asteraceae

**Common names** Batchelor's Buttons, Featherfew, Febridge Plant, Wild Feverfew.

### Description

Easy to grow perennial to 1m high with thick foliage of deeply segmented, oblong-ovate, bright green leaves. Terminal clusters of small, white-petalled daisies with yellow centres, are followed by small seed 3mm long. These seeds, if not picked, will fall and self-seed readily. Propagation can also be done by cuttings or root division. The plant will grow in sun or shade, and adapts to a wide range of soils and climates. An attractive plant when in flower, it is often seen in cottage gardens, but performs equally well grown in a large pot. Leaves have a strong, pungent aroma, which appears to be an insect deterrent, making it a practical companion plant. I have never seen insects feeding on feverfew. Try the leaves in garden sprays. Cut flower stems placed in a vase in the house are long lasting and can also act as a fly repellent.

### Constituents

Volatile oil, bitters

Vitamins: A, B1, B2, B3, C

Minerals: calcium, cobalt, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, chromium, selenium, silicon, sodium, zinc and very high in iron

Actions: tonic, carminative, emmenagogue, stimulant, anti-inflammatory, vasodilator, anti-microbial, analgesic

### Medicinal Uses

Legend says that feverfew saved the life of a craftsman who fell from the Parthenon roof, the Greek temple, during its construction in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. The plant was then honoured with the name *parthenium*.

Since then, this attractive daisy plant has been a 'life saver' to thousands of migraine and headache sufferers. In the 1970's scientific research with double blind, crossover studies verified the potential pain relieving properties of the herb. Chronic migraine and headache sufferers, who had not responded to orthodox treatment, noted a distinct improvement, and many had no further attacks after commencing treatment. Feverfew has given new meaning to life for thousands of migraine sufferers previously plagued not only by excruciating pain, but also nausea and vomiting lasting from hours to days, bringing life to a standstill.

Not only was feverfew bringing liberation for headache and migraine sufferers, but it was also found to offer relief for a wide range of other painful conditions. Ken Hancock author of 'Feverfew, your headache may be over', outlines the many benefits of this herb. Uses have included: relief from coughs, wheezing, sinus congestion, flatulence, premenstrual tension and pain, infertility, hormone imbalance and menopause disturbances, incontinence, eczema, psoriasis, splitting and weak fingernails, car sickness, fevers, drug addiction, intestinal worms, stress and hysteria, high blood pressure, inflammation of tendons, rheumatoid arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis and osteo-arthritis. Response to taking feverfew varies: some people will feel a considerable relief within hours, others within a few days, and yet for others relief can come after 1 – 2 months.

It will be of interest to pet lovers, that feverfew has given relief to dogs with arthritis, and can no doubt be used with other animals in similar pain conditions.

Senior Citizens, who started on feverfew for headaches, have found fringe benefits in the form of relief from joint pain and improved eyesight and hearing. In his book, Ken Hancock refers to feverfew as having an additional advantage as treatment for migraine

and arthritis when comparing it with aspirin, the common drug used for pain relief. Feverfew has few or no demonstrable side effects over a six year period of long-term users, checked for blood pressure, liver function and other important tests.

The only undesirable effects have been mouth and throat irritation in a few allergy sensitive people when ingesting the fresh plant leaf. To test whether you may be allergic to the fresh leaf, crush a leaf and rub it on the soft skin of the wrist. If allergic, an itchy patch may show within 24 hours, but the reaction will normally disappear quickly. For people who can be allergic to eating the fresh leaf there is the alternative of using capsules or tablets. Also, it has been observed that if a person is on synthetic drugs, the effectiveness of feverfew can take longer for response to be felt. Patients on high dosage blood pressure tablets should take feverfew under doctor's supervision. *Feverfew is not a herb to be taken during pregnancy*, it may stimulate uterine contractions. Feverfew may potentiate effects of warfarin therapy.

Feverfew is best taken with food, as this will lessen the rather unpleasant bitterness. Tuck an 8cm long leaf (or 2 small leaves) in the corner of a sandwich, or chop up the leaf and eat with fresh fruit. Another way of taking feverfew is to chop finely and mix with honey and swallow. Often headache and migraine sufferers find that if they take feverfew daily for several months, then they may take a break for a number of months, until the first twinges of pain are once again felt. Then another 1 – 2 months of taking the leaf daily may give another pain free period, as feverfew can continue to give benefits long after ingestion has ceased, creating an immunity to pain. In medical terms this is a *prophylactic effect*, which means it is defending, preventing from, or warding off the disease.

Feverfew's functions perform different tasks in the body that bring relief from pain. It is believed that feverfew neutralises pain causing acids, or activates glands to balance the alkaline/acid ratio better. Feverfew's active chemicals inhibit the production of prostaglandin, thus blocking or reducing inflammation reactions in the body, determining how much blood is delivered to particular tissues. This process is important, for it is the widening and narrowing of blood vessels in the brain that is linked with migraine headaches. Feverfew can also inhibit other substances, like histamines, which are known to increase in the brain, during the early phase of a migraine attack.

For a person who occasionally suffers with headaches, just take an 8cm leaf and eat with food. Many people take the herb instead of reaching for tablets. For migraine sufferers wishing to get started, growing 4 – 5 plants is recommended to keep up a constant supply of leaves for several months. Capsule dose is one tablet, three times a day. It can take several months before migraine sufferers notice an improvement, but it is well worth the wait. It has shown an approximately 80% rate of preventing attacks.

Some time ago I had a lady share that a member of her family had been a migraine sufferer for 40 years. Then she heard of feverfew and found relief after 2 days of taking the leaves. She found that when the leaves ran out, she would have migraines back in 2 days; for her a constant supply of plants and leaves was vital.

Another lady said how she had experienced migraines all her life, on a weekly regularity; but after taking the leaves for 4 months the attacks were completely gone.

A senior citizen shared how she started taking feverfew for severe headaches and completely eliminated hot flushes from her life. I could share many other true life experiences people have shared with me, all of them showing how an easy to grow herb can be a panacea for many pain conditions.

## References

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