



# Lemon Verbena

*Aloysia citriodora*



**Family Name:** Verbenaceae

**Common Name:** Lemon Verbena, Herb Louisa, herba Luisa

**Habitat:** Peru, Chile, Bolivia and Central America. Introduced to Europe in 18th Century though Spain. Popular garden plant though out the world.

**Historical Botanical Names:** Botanical literature shows a variety of names, including *Lippia citriodora* and *L. triphylla*. *Verbena triphylla* and *Aloysia triphylla*. A search of the taxonomic sources provides some clarification. It seems that the plant was first classified from specimens mainly growing in the Royal Garden at Madrid. A French botanist published a description in 1784, and a Spanish botanists in 1785, naming it *Aloysia* in honour of Maria Luisa, princess of Parma and wife of Charles IV of Spain. The plant was later found in the wild by botanists working in South America, who gave it the genus name *Lippi*, in memory of a French-born Italian naturalist, Augustin Lippi, murdered in Abyssinia in 1709.

**Description:** A deciduous shrub, growing to a maximum of 5 metres. The leaves are very fragrant, lanceolate, arranged in threes at each node, hence one name origin *Aloysia triphylla*. 6 to 8cm long, with smooth margins, pale green in colour. The many small flowers are pale purple, blooming during late summer in slim terminal panicles.

**Growing:** Warm climates, sandy soil, and protection from the wind. Grow in full sun in cooler areas and semi-shade in hotter climates. In cooler climates Lemon Verbena requires frost protection. Temperatures below -6degrees Celsius will kill Lemon verbena. Usually grown from softwood cuttings, taken just as buds shoot in Spring. 2-5cm long. Prune in early Winter, to shape the bush and remove dead wood. Grows well as container plant.

**Part Used:** Leaves, dried and fresh.

**Constituents known:** Citral (30-35%) nerol and geraniol

**Actions & Medicinal Use:** Ferbrifuge, sedative, stomachic, antispasmodic in dyspepsia, indigestion and flatulence, stimulating skin and stomach. 100gm to 1 litre infused in hot water for 3- 5 minutes. Wineglass full 3 xs daily. Has shown anti-candida albicans activity.

**Domestic & Historical Use:** Considered the Queen of Aromatic Herbs. The dried leaves are used in sachets and Potpourri. They can retain their odour for years. Oil distilled from plant is used in perfumery. A popular drink in Spain, where it is known as 'Luisa'

**Cautions:** Some constituents of lemon verbena oil have shown to be powerful skin sensitises. Photo toxicity could occur on skin exposed to sunlight. So only use the lemon verbena oil as whole oil used on the skin in the evenings.

**Cooking:** Add smaller leaves to fruit salads, lemonade, baked apples and sponge cakes or shred it on top of Vanilla ice cream. Lemon verbena can be used with poultry, fish, and stuffing recipes, jams and a refreshing sorbet.

### **Recipes**

#### ***Lemon Verbena Tisane***

When served to guests at the end of a meal it's always a soothing surprise. Tisane are similar to teas, but fresh or dried leaves and stems.....rather than fermented ones..... are used to make the brew.

Pour 1 litre of just boiling water over 10 fresh lemon verbena leaves in a ceramic teapot. A little honey or some dried lemon peel can be added, though just straight is great.

#### ***Egyptian tea***

Lemon verbena leaves and sprig of peppermint. A refreshing tea and can also be served chilled.

#### ***Lemon Verbena Liqueur***

½ cup lemon verbena leaves, tightly packed                      1 x 4cm strip of lemon zest (optional)  
4 cups vodka or brandy    2 cups sugar

Place the lightly bruised lemon verbena leaves, the lemon zest if using, and the vodka or brandy in a large jar with a tight-fitting lid. Steep for 2 days, and then add sugar. Steep for 2 more weeks, shaking vigorously once or twice a day to dissolve the sugar, then strain and filter. Transfer the liqueur to bottles and age an additional 2 weeks before using.

#### ***Warm lemon Sponge Soufflé with Lemon Verbena Leaves***

2 whole fresh lemon verbena leaves                                      1 tablespoon butter  
½ cup castor sugar    2 tablespoons twice-sifted flour  
½ teaspoon salt    3 egg yolks at room temperature, lightly beaten  
1 cup milk    2 tablespoons lemon juice, freshly squeezed  
4 egg whites, stiffly beaten    6 fresh lemon leaves, chopped

Preheat oven to 180degrees C. butter the bottom and sides of a med sized soufflé mould and place two criss-crossed lemon verbena leaves on the bottom. Mix the sugar, flour, and salt together in a large bowl. Add the beaten eggs yolks and milk. Add lemon juice and chopped lemon verbena leaves. Beat egg whites until stiff and lightly fold into mixture. Carefully and slowly, without deflating the mixture, pour it into the mould. Place the mould in pan of hot water and bake in the oven for 45 minutes. Serve warm.

#### ***Creamy Lemon Verbena Spread or Dip***

Serve this pretty, pale green, lemony spread in a small bowl on a platter, surrounded by bite-sized pieces of fresh fruit. Strawberries, grapes, halved or quartered stone fruits, apple and pear slices and plump dried fruit. Great spread for a fruit muffin or croissant filling for breakfast.

2 tablespoons sugar    50gm unsalted butter, softened  
¼ cup lightly packed lemon verbena leaves, centre veins removed  
250gm cream cheese, softened if stiff                                      Grated rind of 1 orange  
1 tablespoon Grand Marnier