



## Marshmallow

*Althea officinalis*

This herb belongs to the Malvaceae (Mallow) family and is only related by name to what is in a cellophane bag at the confectioners, not these days anyway. The name is such, as it is 'a mallow which likes to grow in marshlands', areas with good soil moisture.

(Marshmallow in flower - Karina Hilterman)

**Identification & Cultivation:** Marshmallow is a herbaceous perennial, which grows to about 1 metre tall (can grow taller in ideal growing conditions), and a similar width. The stems and leaves are a soft sage green and covered with very fine velvety down. The leaves are alternate along the stem, are cordate at the stem tapering to broad ovate with a narrow point. Flowers burst forth in summer through to autumn, they usually a soft pink, though can be paler or a brighter rose pink, with 5 petals. If pollinated, they are followed by seeds, called 'cheeses' in folklore, because the individual seeds are gathered in flattened round seed cases. The roots are thick, tapering and long, creamy on the outside and white inside, with high mucilage content.

**Part/s Used:** Roots from their second year onwards; leaves, stems and flowers.

**Harvesting:** Pick the flowers through summer. The leaves are also picked in summer, when the flowers are just coming into bloom. They should be stripped off singly and gathered only on a fine day, in the morning, after the dew has been dried off by the sun. The stems, are best harvested in early to mid summer. Harvest the roots, in late autumn to winter, after the plant has died down.

(Marshmallow roots- Victor M. Vicente Selvas - Own work, CC0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=17612621>)

**Character:** Neutral, sweet, moist and cool.

**Constituents:** Roots; mucilage, up to 20% incl, L-rhamnose, D-galactose, D-glucuronic acid & galactonic acid, also, polysaccharides, pectin, volatile oils, sugars, tannins, starch, amino acids, incl. asparagine, phenolic acids, quercetin and kaempferol. Very high in Vitamin A, the B complex vitamins and a wide range of minerals. The leaves have similar constituents, though less mucilage, additionally, has flavonoids, polyphenolic acids & coumarins.

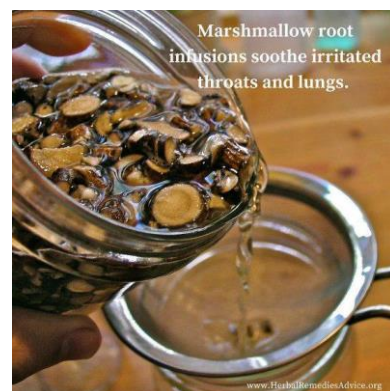
(Marshmallow seeds; <https://ndgbotanicals.com/product/althea-officinalis-seeds/>)

**Therapeutic actions:** Demulcent, emollient, nutritive, tonifying, restorative (esp. mucous membrane & endocrine system), vulnerary, diuretic, expectorant, antispasmodic, relaxant, nervine and diuretic.

**Medicinal Uses:** Marshmallow is a valuable herb for using internally and topically. The mucilage content, highest in the roots, is able 'to coat and protect' the bodies mucous membrane, thereby soothing and protecting it—from scratchy sore throats bronchitis and easing dry coughs, to the gastric mucosa, to ease digestive dysfunctions; stomach ulceration, irritable bowel, Crohn's disease and colitis, also, urinary system irritations and infections. The mucilage is not digested in the upper part of the gut but when reaches the colon is 'digested' by gut bacteria. It is a 'wound healer' whether internally or externally. Topically apply to wounds, irritations, inflammation, eczema, rashes and bruises.

The following recipe for Marshmallow tea is from Rosalee de la Forêt; Put 1/4 cup of marshmallow root in a pint size jar. Fill this jar with cold to lukewarm water and let sit for a minimum of four hours. You will notice that this brew will get more mucilaginous and slippery with time. Strain when ready and drink as desired. (Photo by

Rosalee de la Forêt)



*"In pulmonary consumption and other wasting diseases it is one of the finest strengthening medicines to which employment can be given; possessing so much nutriment that it may with propriety, with the addition of milk, be taken as a food agreeing with and remaining in the stomach when that organ has become intolerant of other foods."* - Hatfield Botanic Pharmacopoeia, 1886

**Dosages:** Infusions of leaves & /roots up to 5gms daily.

Tinctures: Leaves; 40-100 mls per week, Roots; 20-40mls per week.

*.. "As for me, olives, endives, and mallows provide sustenance"* – Horace (65 BC – 8 BC), Roman Poet.

**Cautions & Contraindications:** This is generally considered a very safe herb, it may potentially affect blood sugar levels, take care with diabetes. Because it coats and protects the gastric mucosa, it may affect the assimilation of other medications.

(*Althaea officinalis* - Köhler-s Medizinal-Pflanzen 1897)



**Culinary Uses:** Pick the flowers for use in salads, or dry to add to infusions.

Dip them into a light sweet batter & deep fry to serve as fritters. The young tender leaves can be added to salads, cooked or fried as fritters. A traditional method of preparations was to first boil the roots, then to fry in butter with onions – perhaps add other ingredients and herbs to suit? In the Middle East, an extract of the roots is traditionally used in making ‘*halva*’, a confectionery. It also appears in dessert recipes throughout Europe. Then of course there is the confectionery, named marshmallows because they were made with the root of this herb (here’s a link to a recipe from Rosalee de la Forêt (<http://www.herbmentor.com/marshmallow-root-marshmallows/>)).

For those with digestive disorders, unable to eat many foods, marshmallow root is usually easily digested and can be used similarly to slippery elm, both assist to soothe the damaged gastric mucosa.

*“ whoever swallows daily half a cyathus\* of the juice of any one of the (the mallows) will be immune to all diseases that may come to him”* – Pliny AD 77 (\*A cyathus is both a drinking vessel, specifically for drinking wine, or a small ladle which is used to transfer the beverage from its container to the drinking-cup. They were used by the Romans, who borrowed them from the Greeks. They were generally a specific measurement, about 3 tablespoons).

**History & Mystery:** Some of the common names for Marshmallow include; sweet weed, witte malve mallards. Maults, schloss tea, ketmia, cheeses. mortification root, de guimauve (French), gul hatem & hitmi (Turkish), malve & malvavisco (Spanish), bismalva & buonvischio (Italian), altheia, Eibischwurzel & apothekerstockmalve (German) and more...

Ah, the ‘mystery’ of this herb: Gender; feminine, Planet; moon, Element; water, Powers; Love, protection and exorcism. The alleged ‘Magical Uses’ – If you carry Mallow, then it is thought to attract love to you. It is suggested that if your love ‘has left you’ that you gather a bunch of Mallow and put it in a vase – either outside your door or in a window – this is to inspire them to think of you and to consider returning. If you need a ‘spiritually protective balm, then infuse Mallow stems and leaves in oil, strain and bottle. Rub this onto skin to ‘cast out devils’ and to ‘protect against the harmful effects of black magic’! The Greek word ‘*malake*’, meaning soft is the origin of the family name Malvaceae. ‘Althea’ is derived from the Greek word althino, which translates to ‘*I cure*’, as it was a greatly valued herb and food for the Greeks, also for the Romans, lands throughout the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, in China it is used in traditional remedies. In Syria, it had a tradition of being the good food during a famine period, there’s so much more information, such a valuable & respected herb...

*“Common mallows are generally so well known that they need no description.” And "You may remember that not long since there was a raging disease called the bloody flux; the College of Physicians not knowing what to make of it, called it The Plague in the Guts, for their wits were at ne plus ultra about it. My son was taken with the same disease; myself being in the country, was sent for; the only thing I gave him was Mallow bruised and boiled both in milk and drink; in two days it cured him, and I have here to shew my thankfulness to God in communicating it to his creatures, leaving it to posterity."* – Nicholas Culpepper (1616-1664)

Prepared by Karina Hilterman for the Herb Federation of New Zealand’s Herb Awareness Week 2018 Inquiries to HFNZ, PO Box 546, Fielding 4740 - [www.herbs.org.nz](http://www.herbs.org.nz)

**\*Advisory Note:** This text is given a general guidance. If any adverse reactions occur or symptoms persist, please contact a qualified Medical Herbalist or Doctor immediately.