

Calming Chamomile

After Peter Rabbit's exploits in Mr. McGregor's garden, "His mother put him to bed and made some chamomile tea; and she gave a dose of it to Peter." — *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* by Beatrix Potter

The pretty little chamomile flower is renowned for its ability to soothe and relax. That's why it's a favorite in bedtime baths and teas. Another way to put chamomile to calming use is to mix it into potpourri blends, sachets, and sleep pillows.

- 1 cup chamomile flowers
- 1 cup lavender flowers
- 1 cup rosemary leaf
- ½ cup thyme leaf
- 1 cup lemon verbena leaf
- 2 teaspoons orris root powder
- 1 teaspoon coriander seed powder
- a few drops of lavender essential oil

Mix first five ingredients together in a glass bowl.

In a separate bowl, combine the orris root with the coriander. Add the lavender oil and stir.

Combine the orris root mixture with the dried flowers and leaves and mix well. Place the mixture in a covered glass container for about a month, then use in potpourri bowls or sachets. Refresh the potpourri with a drop or two of oil every so often.

To use the potpourri in a sleep pillow, simply sew a fabric pillowcase the desired size. Wrap the finished potpourri in cotton batting, if you'd like the pillow to be soft, and then stuff into the pillow. Sew the open end closed. Place in a plastic bag for about 24 hours, before using, to strengthen the scent.



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Q&A



I've heard of people having allergic reactions to chamomile. How common is this?

Allergic reactions to chamomile are rare, but possible. If you're allergic to ragweed, aster and chrysanthemums (members of the Asteraceae family), it's possible that you may also react to chamomile. (If taken internally, you might have some bronchial constriction, and if used topically, you might have a skin reaction.) Often when people have allergic reactions to chamomile, though, the plants are not true chamomile, but one of a number of "mayweeds" or other plants that are commonly called chamomile. If you grow your own true chamomile or purchase it from a company that positively identifies the plant, you're much less likely to have problems with chamomile allergies.

Chamomile seems so soothing. Will a chamomile bath help a sunburn?

Yes, that's a great idea. But for even more real relief, soak a tablespoon of chamomile flowers in 2 tablespoons of witch hazel for ten minutes, then strain. Add a teaspoon of honey. Dab onto the sunburn. Rinse off after 15 minutes or so.

Chamomile

While chamomile is a friendly, down-to-earth sort of plant, to formally introduce it requires a familiarity with a range of botanical names. In fact, the common name chamomile has been applied to over a dozen species of the aster family. The two true chamomiles though, are commonly known as German chamomile, and Roman, or English chamomile. German chamomile has been classified by botanists as *Matricaria recutital*, *M. recutita*, *Chamomilla recutita* and *Matricaria chamomilla*, while Roman chamomile has been classified both as *Anthemis nobilis* and *Chamaemelum nobile*.

Roman is the common chamomile of England; it was first dubbed Roman chamomile in 1598, when the plant grew abundantly near Rome. It's an aromatic perennial that creeps along the ground, reaching only about one foot in height. (As a matter of fact, the name chamomile comes from the Greek *chamos* (ground) and *melos* (apple), a reference to its mildly apple scent. German chamomile is a sweet-scented annual that grows to about 2 ½ feet in height.

While in England Roman chamomile is preferred, in Europe and the U.S. the German is more popular. There are genetic and chemical differences between the two chamomiles, but both are widely cultivated in Europe and America, and they are similarly used in beauty products, tinctures, extracts, salves and compresses for a number of skin and stomach ailments. Chamomile tea is enjoyed alone or in tea blends. In fact, according to one estimate, over one million cups of chamomile tea are drunk worldwide every day!



Top to Toe Chamomile Care

Bathing Beauty

Fill a tea ball or muslin bag with chamomile flowers. Place it under the running tub faucet when you draw a bath. The herb will moisturize and relax. Add elder flowers, mullein flowers, rose petals, lavender flowers and/or linden flowers to enhance your experience.

Steam Clean

To moisturize and cleanse your skin, place a handful of chamomile flowers in a large bowl. Add boiling water, then lean over the bowl, with a towel draped over your head. Steam for about ten minutes, then rinse with warm, then cool water. Other good additions include rosemary, sage, rose petals, and mint.



Tootsie Treat

If you don't have time for a full-body soak, draw a chamomile footbath (simply add an infusion, or strong tea, of chamomile to a basin of warm water).

Eye Openers

A pair of chamomile teabags (fill your own muslin bags with chamomile flowers) that have been steeped make soothing eye compresses. Simply place the warm or cool bags on your eyes while you lie down for about 15 minutes.



Chamomile Crown

Soften and brighten light-colored hair with a chamomile rinse. Simmer four tablespoons chamomile flowers in two cups of water for about half an hour. (Cover the pot to avoid evaporation.) Pour rinse through hair after shampooing. Catch the rinse in a bucket and re-apply several times, if you like. For enhanced lightening, add a tablespoon of lemon juice to your chamomile rinse. (If you use the lemon, follow with a plain water rinse.)

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