



# Relishing Rosemary

This common garden herb has a myriad of uses, a rich smell and an even richer history. *By Rachel Kossman*

Whether you've rubbed rosemary on poultry prior to roasting, mixed the herb's essential oil into a warm bath, included the plant in your spa's treatments or used its flowering sprigs for decor, you're no doubt familiar with the needle-like leaves of this aromatic evergreen. Rosemary's name, derived from the Latin *ros* and *marinus*, translates to "dew of the sea"—and sure enough, the Mediterranean perennial grows abundantly on seaside cliffs.

Rosemary is a member of the mint family, and if pruned and planted outdoors, it can grow up to six feet tall. The herb can also be potted and grown indoors, as long as it has access to plenty of natural light. Pale-blue, sometimes lilac, flowers typically bloom on the evergreen in late spring or early summer, depending on the climate. Although rosemary is considered a common herb—a staple in seasoning racks and home gardens—the plant's history is more deeply rooted than one might realize.

## AN HERBAL HISTORY

Rosemary is referenced in texts that date as far back as 79 AD. Romans brought the plant to England in the eighth century, the Spaniards cultivated it soon

thereafter, and by the 1400s the herb had become popular as a meat preservative and seasoning. "Where rosemary flourishes, the woman rules," is an old saying that alludes to the common practice of medieval housewives cultivating the plant on their properties.

Because of its association with memory and affection, rosemary has been a part of both weddings and funerals throughout human history. Brides in the 11th and 12th centuries frequently wore wreaths entwined with rosemary stems to symbolize love, fidelity and abiding friendship. In the mid-1500s, Anne of Cleves, fourth wife of Henry VIII, wore a rosemary wreath at their wedding, and the royal couple presented a gilded branch to each of their guests.

Conversely, Ancient Egyptians lay rosemary across their tombs, Shakespeare's Juliet was buried with the herb, and participants in Anzac Day, an Australian and New Zealand remembrance holiday, often wear rosemary on their lapels.

Robert Herrick, a 17th-century English poet, refers to the plant's paradoxical symbolism in "The Rosemarie Branch:" "Grow for two ends—it matters not at all; Be't for my bridall, or my buriall."

There's also plenty of folklore associated with rosemary. Some contend that a rosemary bush gave shelter to the Virgin Mary on her travels into Egypt; others believe that the biblical figure spread her cloak over the bush to dry, turning its white flowers blue. The Spanish and Italians have long believed that rosemary can be used to safeguard against witches and other evil influences; there are tales of young fairies, in the form of snakes, taking reprieve in the herb's branches.

Perhaps most interesting of all, in the 14th century it was believed that if a concoction of rosemary roots, boiled in wine vinegar, was used to wash the feet of a thief, he or she would no longer be compelled to steal. This tale was most likely rooted in rosemary's proven effectiveness as an antiseptic—people of the same time period would place branches of the herb on the floor to combat diseases and ward off rodents.

## MEDICINAL MERITS

Rosemary hasn't just been appreciated throughout history: Modern day skincare practitioners express high praise for the piney-scented herb as well. "Rosemary is such a prolific, incredibly giving plant," enthuses Kim Manley, founder and creator of Kim Manley Herbals (kmherbals.com). "It has a lovely essence that is relaxing, soothing and serene—perfect for the spa world."

Rosemary's fragrance can be incredibly powerful. "Its aroma can help clients overcome mental fatigue, and boost mental clarity and focus," explains Janel Luu, CEO of PurErb (purerbskincare.com), an herbology-based skincare and aromatherapy brand. "Scientists have found that the scent boosts alertness and eases anxiety."



Aside from its distinct attar, rosemary is known primarily for its rejuvenating and antiseptic properties. The plant's essential oils can be classified into several chemotypes—essential oils whose chemical composition contains one or more chemicals that dominate over the others. Three of the most common rosemary chemotypes are:

- **Rosemary camphor:** This strain of the herb is commonly used to treat acne, and also helps improve circulation, detox tissues and decongest veins. Rosemary camphor can help loosen and clear mucus, and acts as a cardiac tonic and diuretic.
- **Rosemary verbenone:** There are two varieties of this chemotype: one grows mainly in France, the other in the U.S. It tends to have a rounded, fruitier smell when compared with other chemotypes that evoke sharper olfactory reactions. This varietal is best for mature, regenerative skin care and increasing sebum. It's also useful for treating sinus infections or as an antispasmodic.
- **Rosemary cineole:** Grown in France, Morocco and the U.S., this variation of rosemary makes an excellent component of massage aids, baths, compresses and lotions. It's frequently used on clients suffering from chronic fatigue and muscular or respiratory decongestion.

## Reining in Rosemary

Try any of these simple ways to incorporate rosemary into your spa.

- Plant a small pot of rosemary in a sunny window. It will grow from any long, plucked stem of another rosemary plant; simply peel the spiny leaves off of the bottom two inches of the stem and place in water for four to eight weeks. Once roots sprout, plant in a terra-cotta pot, with draining rocks and potting soil.
- For a fragrant decor, dry out bunches of rosemary by tying a handful of branches together and hanging them upside down in a cool, dry place.
- Boiling water infused with rosemary, when cooled slightly, can be used as a decongesting steam treatment.
- Have your staff rub rosemary leaves between their palms at the start of a service—the relaxing scent will fill the entire room.
- Employ rosemary, mint and tea tree oil as a foot soak during a pedicure.
- Infuse rosemary into several cups of boiling water. Once it has cooled, use as a growth-stimulating, dandruff-eliminating hair rinse—a potential protocol step or add-on.
- Pair lavender and rosemary essential oils as a facial toner for oily skin.



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## HERBAL HEALTH

All types of rosemary, Manley points out, work well in a diffuser. "Rosemary is also great as a room spray, or as a sinus oil. During cold season, I dab some on a cotton swab and apply it to my nostrils before I leave the house," she says. The herb's antiseptic properties make its essential oil an ideal purse addition during travel.

Rosemary has long been thought of as a memory stimulant, and a 2013 study at Northumbria University in Newcastle in the U.K. supports the theory. Researchers divided participants into two rooms, one of which held a rosemary diffuser, and asked volunteers to take memory tests. Blood samples from participants were subsequently tested for levels of the 1,8-cineole compound, an element of rosemary essential oil involved in biochemical processes linked to memory. Individuals in the rosemary-scented room were found to have higher levels of 1,8-cineole in their blood, suggesting that components of the essential oil were absorbed into their bloodstreams. The study also discovered a link between blood levels of 1,8-cineole and performance in memory tasks, which may have future implications for treating memory impairments.

Rosemary's internal health benefits also abound. "When ingested, the herb is great for indigestion and menstrual cramping," says Kim Borio, CEO and founder of Glycelene Skincare, who notes that rosemary has long been considered a "healing herb" because of its antioxidant and antimicrobial properties. "It's also great for stress relief—as an anti-anxiety and to help with nervous fatigue," says Borio.

The best part about this incredibly beneficial plant? "Anyone can grow it," declares Manley. "Really, anyone!"

*Rachel Kossman is DAYSPA's associate editor.*

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