

# Common yarrow

*(Achillea millefolium)*

This aromatic native perennial is found from the Snake River to Anatone. Its ability to grow in a variety of habitats including coniferous forests, sagebrush, riparian, meadow and alpine communities make it one of the more frequently recognized native flowers in our area. Although widely distributed and relatively common, it doesn't "take over" plant communities. Due to its hardiness and lack of invasive tendencies, it is an important plant to help fortify our natural areas to keep them free of noxious weeds.



Yarrow may grow 1 to 2 feet in height and produce one or more stems. The finely divided leaves look feather-like and are equally distributed along the stem. The plant is covered with woolly hairs that give it a gray-green look. The whitish flowers grow in either a flat-topped or dome-shaped cluster. Some flowers may have a pinkish cast.

Yarrow has been used as a medicinal plant for thousands of years. When yarrow was found in a grave of a Neanderthal man, anthropologists assumed that the plants were held in high regard. (In this same grave, yellow starthistle was also found. Does yellow starthistle have some medicinal or other qualities that we have overlooked?). Ancient peoples used the plants for colds, fevers, and as anti-inflammatory agents for wounds. According to the 17<sup>th</sup> century herbalist, Culpepper, "It stays the shedding of hair, the head being bathed with the decoction of it; inwardly taken it helps the retentive faculty of the stomach." The Greeks considered it an all-around herb for good health.



Yarrow even played a starring role in the Trojan War. Achilles' mother, Thetis, was a goddess, but his father, Peleus, was a mortal. Therefore, Achilles was also mortal. In order to protect Achilles, Thetis dipped him into a bath of yarrow (holding him by his heel). She believed this plant to be so powerful that it would help her son live forever. Achilles grew up to be a famous Greek warrior. However, an arrow shot by the Trojan warrior, Paris, hit him in his heel and he died from this wound. Today we remember Achilles every time we see yarrow since the genus, Achillea, is named after him.

*Submitted by Nelle Murray, Coordinator, Asotin County  
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