

Bee Balm, Bergamot/Oswego Tea (*Monarda didyma* sp.)

Bee Balm is an herbaceous perennial native to eastern North America. A member of the mint family, Bee Balm was used by Native Americans for its herbal properties, mainly to treat headaches. Known in America as 'Oswego Tea', it was introduced to the early colonists by the Oswego Indians, and made popular in colonial America after the Boston Tea Party.

There are lots of reasons to grow Bee Balm. It's a hardy perennial with gorgeous flowers that bloom all summer long. Its aromatic, lance-shaped leaves are the central flavoring in Earl Grey Tea. It has distinctive tubular flowers that spike out of the cone. Most colors are scarlet, although there are several hybrid selections that come in white, pink, purple and blue. The flowers are loaded with nectar and have a fragrance that is especially attractive to bees (hence the name Bee Balm) but will have frequent visitors of hummingbirds and butterflies. The whole plant has a strong delightful fragrance, even after the blooms have faded.

Bee Balm is easy to grow in most zones and will make a great addition to the perennial garden. Bee Balm prefers full sun, but will also grow well in partial shade. Generally two to three feet tall and as wide, Bee Balm can be a spreading plant, especially when it's not given full sun, so give some thought to where you're going to place it in your garden. Back of the borders works best. It also makes a great container plant.

Bee Balm is easily propagated by its roots, or cuttings. It's clumps benefit by division every three to five years in the spring. A good indicator that it needs division is when the center of the clump has died out or becomes hollow. This is a good time to share it with your friends and neighbors.

Clean up any plant debris in the fall as the leftover stems and leaves can shelter mildew spores over the winter. Mildew is the only problem that sometimes bothers these plants.

Bee Balm is an edible plant that has a touch of orange flavor. Use the fresh leaves and flowers to add a citrus tang to fruit salads or as a garnish. The leaves and flowers can be dried and used in potpourri or tea. To dry, just bundle 8-10 stems with a rubber band at the cut end and hang upside down in a dark, dry area until they become crisp to the touch. Crush and store in an airtight container, away from direct sunlight. To make a cup of tea, simply place one tablespoon of fresh or one teaspoon of dried Bee Balm leaves and or flowers in a tea strainer and pour one cup boiling water over it. Allow it to steep for ten minutes. Sweeten if you wish, and enjoy.

If you decide to grow Bee Balm for the bees, hummingbirds, and butterflies, you won't be disappointed, and neither will they. Or maybe you want to start your own tea garden. Plant them next to lemon verbena, rose hips, chamomile, and jasmine and have the freshest tea in town. Or maybe you just want to look at the beautiful flowers. Whatever your reason, you'll be glad you decided on Bee Balm.

References

[Bee Balm](#), retrieved 8/12/07

Bee Balm and a Revolution, retrieved 2/12/07 from http://www.hgtv.com/hgtv/gl_plants_perennials/article/0..HGTV_3610_4061995.00.html

[Bee Balm, A Beautiful and Useful Plant for your Garden](#) retrieved 2/12/07

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