Peppermint: Growing, Foraging and Cooking

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Peppermint (the plant), in summary:** Peppermint (Mentha x piperita) is a watermint-spearmint hybrid; very easy to grow, classic Black Mitcham English cultivar, menthol provides cooling.

Last reviewed by the teas.co.uk team in May 2026.

Peppermint is the menthol rich hybrid of watermint and spearmint: the strong mint, the mint with IBS evidence, the after meal mint. It's been cultivated across Europe and North Africa since at least the 18th century, and the UK has its own peppermint growing tradition (Black Mitcham peppermint from Surrey was famous in its day).

The plant

Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*) is a hybrid that arose in 17th century England between watermint (Mentha aquatica) and spearmint (Mentha spicata). The hybrid produces:

- Higher menthol content than parent species (40-50% of essential oil)
- Sharper cooling sensation
- Stronger traditional uses

The famous Black Mitcham variety from Surrey was particularly highly regarded historically. Modern peppermint is grown commercially across Europe, the US (Pacific Northwest especially), India, and other regions.

The cooling sensation explained

Menthol triggers cold sensing receptors (TRPM8) in the mouth, throat, and skin without actually lowering temperature. This produces the distinctive "cooling" sensation that defines peppermint. The same receptors respond to actual cold; menthol "tricks" them.

Beyond the cooling, menthol has:

- Antispasmodic effects on intestinal smooth muscle
- Antibacterial properties

- Mild analgesic effects (cooling reduces pain perception)
- Decongestant effects (opens nasal passages)

The major peppermint products

Tea bags / loose leaf tea

Dried peppermint leaves brewed as infusion. The standard daily drinking format. Detailed benefits guide.

Peppermint oil capsules

Concentrated peppermint oil in enteric coated capsules. Designed to deliver oil to the small intestine. Strongest evidence for IBS support. Brands: Colpermin, Mintec.

Peppermint essential oil

Concentrated oil for aromatherapy or topical use. Don't ingest neat, too concentrated.

Peppermint extract / flavouring

For baking and cooking. Real peppermint oil diluted in alcohol or oil base.

Brewing peppermint tea

1. 1 bag (or 1 tsp dried peppermint) per 200ml.
2. Just boiled water.
3. Cover the cup. Steep 5-7 minutes.
4. Drink black, with lemon, or with honey.

The Black Mitcham heritage

Mitcham, Surrey was historically the centre of UK peppermint production from the 18th to mid-20th century. "Black Mitcham" peppermint was prized for its high quality essential oil and exported around the world. Most UK peppermint production has since moved abroad, but the Black Mitcham name persists as a quality marker for some products.

Common peppermint blends

- **Peppermint + chamomile.** Cooling and settling.
- **Peppermint + liquorice.** Sweet cooling.
- **Peppermint + ginger.** Stronger digestive support.
- **Peppermint + lemon.** Bright refreshing.
- **Three mint blends.** Peppermint + spearmint + field mint.

UK peppermint brands

- **Pukka Three Mint.** Three mint species blended; organic.

- **Pukka Peppermint & Liquorice.** Sweet mint blend.
- **Clipper Pure Peppermint.** Fairtrade, organic.
- **Twinings Pure Peppermint.** Mainstream supermarket.
- **Heath & Heather Peppermint.** UK herbal.
- **Yogi Peppermint.** A herbal brand from the US.
- **Specialist Black Mitcham peppermint.** Niche premium option.

Foraging UK peppermint

Peppermint grows easily in UK gardens, in fact, it spreads invasively. Pick fresh leaves; brew immediately for best aromatic intensity. Or dry on a tray for storage tea.

Wild peppermint can be found in damp areas, hedgerows, woodland edges. Identification: opposite leaf pairs, square stems (mint family characteristic), distinct cool menthol smell when crushed.

Cooking with peppermint

- **Peppermint creams.** Christmas confection.
- **Peppermint chocolate (After Eight style).**
- **Peppermint cocktails.** Mojito and similar.
- **Mint sauce** (UK lamb accompaniment).
- **Peppermint ice cream.**

Caffeine

0mg.

Cautions

- **Reflux/GERD.** Peppermint can worsen reflux in some sufferers.
- **Pregnancy.** 1-2 cups daily is generally fine. Some sources advise caution against high volume in first trimester.
- **Young children.** Avoid peppermint oil for children under 5; tea strength is gentler but worth caution.
- **Gallstones.** Peppermint may stimulate bile flow.

Use cases

- After heavy meals (digestive)
- IBS related discomfort
- Cold and flu (decongestant via steam)
- Tension headaches (mild)
- Bad breath
- Caffeine free refreshing daytime / evening drink

- Cold brewed iced summer drinks

FAQ

What is peppermint? A hybrid mint species with high menthol content. Strongly cooling, with a sharp, high menthol aroma.

Caffeine? 0mg.

Best after meals? Yes, strong clinical evidence for IBS support; modest for general digestive comfort.

Can children drink it? For children's ages and doses of peppermint, a GP, health visitor or pharmacist is the one to ask; we don't advise.

Pregnancy safe? In pregnancy the NHS limit for herbal tea, peppermint included, is 4 cups a day, with liquorice root to be avoided. Ask your midwife or pharmacist if unsure. Avoid concentrated peppermint oil.

Curator's note: peppermint is one of the most reliably useful herbal teas. Strong digestive evidence, no caffeine, freshly cooling. The Pukka Three Mint blend is the daily one I keep at home; pure peppermint for specific IBS style discomfort. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

In short: peppermint the plant

Aspect	The note
Latin	Mentha x piperita (hybrid: watermint + spearmint)
UK habitat	Gardens, hedgerows, damp ground, riverbanks
Distinguishing trait	Strong menthol cool sensation; serrated dark green leaves
Black Mitcham	Famous English cultivar from Surrey, 18th century
Active compound	Menthol (40-60% of essential oil)
Growing	Very easy; invasive in beds; grow in pots
Picking	Late spring through autumn; young tops best
Drying	Simple; tied bunches in dry airy place 5-7 days

More on peppermint

Continue with peppermint tea, peppermint tea benefits, the mint overview and herbal tea.

Where this fits in the wider range: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. More in the tea shop; peppermint baskets above £35 go free to UK addresses.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Grow your own and peppermint costs nothing per cup; bought, compare by the cup. Loose dried peppermint usually wins, though bags sometimes do too.

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