



The Healthy Truth

Marshmallow Root

By Kim Balas

Originally, the marshmallow plant was native to specific regions of Europe and Asia but now it can be found in areas of the United States. The scientific name for the marshmallow plant is *Althaea Officinalis*, which in Greek means to heal. The plant, throughout history, is known as "the official healer." The Romans and the Egyptians ate the root as a vegetable, the poor in Syria ate the marshmallow root as part of their daily food intake and, in the Bible, the marshmallow plant was the food of choice in times of famine. The marshmallow plant grows in damp, wet areas including meadows and marshes. The leaves of the marshmallow plant as well as the root are used medicinally.

The Marshmallow root and leaf both contain a substance known as mucilage. When the root becomes wet, it swells and becomes very slippery. The soothing affect provided by the mucilage calms irritated or inflamed tissues. Throughout time, the marshmallow plant has been used to soothe chapped skin and to heal minor wounds. One of the most famous benefits of this herb is when it is used as a "drawing paste". When applied to a splinter, thorn or bee sting, it draws out the offender and speeds healing. If the skin is red or irritated, you can apply crushed marshmallow to it to speed up the healing time. The marshmallow plant is also believed to have the ability to fight infection and boost the immune system. Today, British health authorities consider all marshmallow root preparations safe and effective.

Below is a list of conditions that the marshmallow plant has been known to improve:

- Abscesses
- Arthritis
- Bee stings
- Boils
- Burns
- Cystitis
- Dermatitis
- Sprains
- Wound healing

Marshmallow Plant: Herbal Remedies

By Jennifer Brett, N.D.



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The root, leaf and flower of the marshmallow plant is used by herbalists in several all-natural remedies.

The mallow family includes the beautiful hibiscus (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*), whose large, colorful blossoms grace Hawaii, and the hollyhocks (*Althea rosacea*), a summer garden favorite throughout Europe and North America.

All of the mallows bear lovely but short-lasting blossoms with thin, moist petals that become sticky if crushed. *Althea* is from the Greek word *althino*, meaning "to heal." It is so named because mallow has been used medicinally for centuries. The Greeks used marshmallow root to treat wounds, toothaches, coughing, and insect stings. The Romans valued the marshmallow leaf for its laxative properties. Mallow is mentioned by Hippocrates and Culpepper in their herbal treatises. And, the confection we know today, the marshmallow, received its name because the treats of old were originally flavored with the roots of the marshmallow plant.

Mallow has been used as a soothing demulcent to help heal wounds and internal tissues. With the help of herbalists, many people have credited the marshmallow plant for remedying their infections and for helping them avoid repeated antibiotic therapy. Mallow preparations are used internally and topically to treat abrasions, rashes, inflammations as well as help boost cell immunity.

The roots are considered a demulcent (which means it soothes irritated, inflamed or injured surfaces); an emollient (which means it softens and soothes the skin), and vulnerary (which means it is used in the healing and treatment of wounds). The root contains about 15-20% mucilage (polysaccharides), starch (38%), vitamins B1, B2, B3 and C and minerals such as calcium, iron, phosphorous, and potassium.

Due to its high oleic level (approx. 80%) and other superior properties, the marshmallow plant is also used for its anti-microbial and anti-inflammatory properties to treat localized skin irritations, boils, burns, sores, ulcers, wounds and other inflammations.