

ASHFORGE



# Botanical Starter Guide

*Seven plants for a thoughtful herbal kitchen*

A FIELD GUIDE TO IDENTITY, FLAVOR, RESEARCH, AND RESPONSIBLE USE

ashforge.co | Raleigh, North Carolina



# Begin with observation

This small guide is an invitation to notice a plant before reaching for a claim. Learn its botanical name, aroma, flavor, common preparation, and important cautions. Then follow the source and keep asking good questions.

## A SIMPLE FIELD PRACTICE

- 1 Identify the plant and the part being used.
- 2 Notice aroma, texture, bitterness, sweetness, and color.
- 3 Choose food-level preparations before concentrated products.
- 4 Review cautions, medicines, pregnancy, allergies, and age.
- 5 Record what you prepared and how you responded.

### IMPORTANT

This guide is educational and is not medical advice. Herbs can cause side effects and interact with medicines. Seek qualified guidance for symptoms, pregnancy, breastfeeding, children, chronic conditions, or concentrated products.

# C Chamomile

*Matricaria chamomilla* L.

## RECOGNIZE

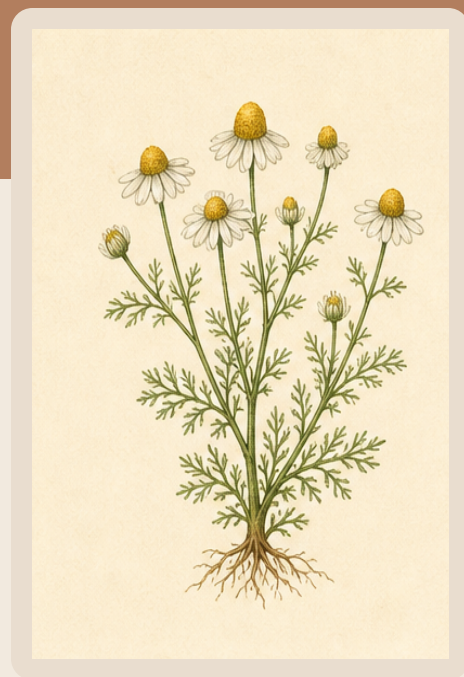
Small golden-centered blossoms with a softly sweet, apple-like aroma.

## IN THE KITCHEN

Use the dried flower heads for a gentle infusion. Chamomile pairs naturally with lemon balm, lavender, citrus peel, or honey.

## WHAT RESEARCH SUGGESTS

Early studies suggest possible benefit for generalized anxiety, but evidence for most uses - including insomnia - remains limited.



## SAFETY & PREPARATION

Avoid if you have a serious daisy-family allergy. Chamomile may interact with warfarin, sedatives, and some other medicines.

## SOURCE

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/chamomile>

# Ginger

*Zingiber officinale* Roscoe

## RECOGNIZE

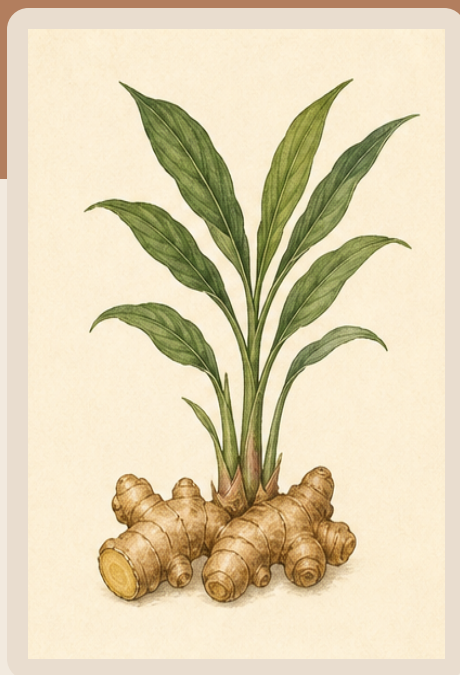
A warming, aromatic rhizome with bright citrus notes and lingering spice.

## IN THE KITCHEN

Slice fresh ginger for infusions, grate it into syrups, or use the dried powder sparingly in warming blends.

## WHAT RESEARCH SUGGESTS

Supplements may help pregnancy-related nausea and menstrual cramps. Evidence for motion sickness and several other uses is uncertain.



## SAFETY & PREPARATION

Ginger may cause heartburn, diarrhea, or irritation and may interact with medicines. Breastfeeding safety is not well established.

## SOURCE

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/ginger>

# L Lavender

*Lavandula angustifolia* Mill.

## RECOGNIZE

A fragrant purple flower with floral, resinous, and softly herbaceous notes.

## IN THE KITCHEN

Use culinary-grade flowers with a measured hand. A small pinch can perfume tea, shortbread, sugar, or citrus-forward syrups.

## WHAT RESEARCH SUGGESTS

A specific oral lavender-oil product may help anxiety. Evidence for aromatherapy, sleep, and pain remains unclear.



## SAFETY & PREPARATION

Lavender may interact with sedatives and can cause allergy or irritation. Pregnancy safety is not well established.

## SOURCE

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/lavender>

# P Peppermint

*Mentha x piperita L.*

## RECOGNIZE

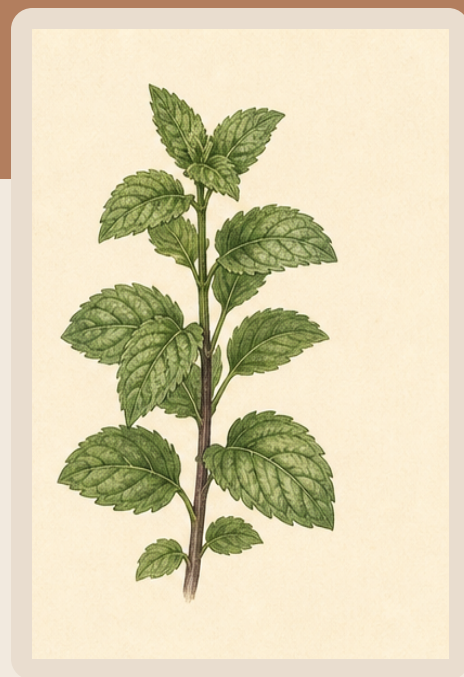
A vivid cooling mint with a clean aroma and a naturally sweet finish.

## IN THE KITCHEN

Steep the leaves alone or use them to brighten cacao, black tea, citrus, or berry blends. Tea and essential oil are not interchangeable.

## WHAT RESEARCH SUGGESTS

Enteric-coated peppermint-oil capsules may improve overall symptoms and abdominal pain in adults with IBS; leaf evidence is limited.



## SAFETY & PREPARATION

Peppermint oil can cause heartburn or skin irritation and should not be applied near the face of infants or young children.

## SOURCE

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/peppermint-oil>

# Turmeric

*Curcuma longa L.*

## RECOGNIZE

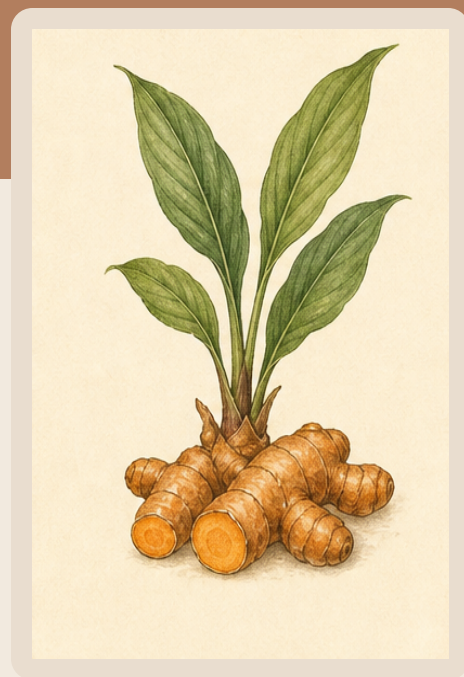
A golden rhizome with earthy warmth, gentle bitterness, and staining color.

## IN THE KITCHEN

Use it in broths, rice, warm milk-style drinks, spice pastes, or tea blends with ginger and black pepper.

## WHAT RESEARCH SUGGESTS

Early findings for knee osteoarthritis are positive but inconclusive. Evidence for fatty liver and many other uses remains insufficient.



## SAFETY & PREPARATION

Some enhanced-absorption products have been linked to liver injury. Supplements may be unsafe during pregnancy.

## SOURCE

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/turmeric>

# G Garlic

*Allium sativum L.*

## RECOGNIZE

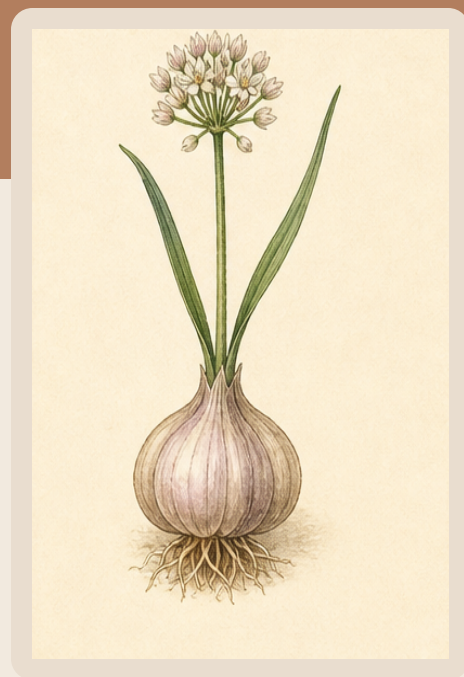
A pungent bulb whose sharpness softens into sweetness when slowly cooked.

## IN THE KITCHEN

Use fresh cloves in savory food, roast whole bulbs, or combine gently with herbs in broths and infused culinary preparations.

## WHAT RESEARCH SUGGESTS

Supplements may produce small reductions in total and LDL cholesterol and possibly small blood-pressure or blood-sugar changes.



## SAFETY & PREPARATION

Supplements may increase bleeding risk. Raw garlic on skin can cause chemical burns; higher-than-food pregnancy amounts may be unsafe.

## SOURCE

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/garlic>

# Elderberry

*Sambucus nigra L.*

## RECOGNIZE

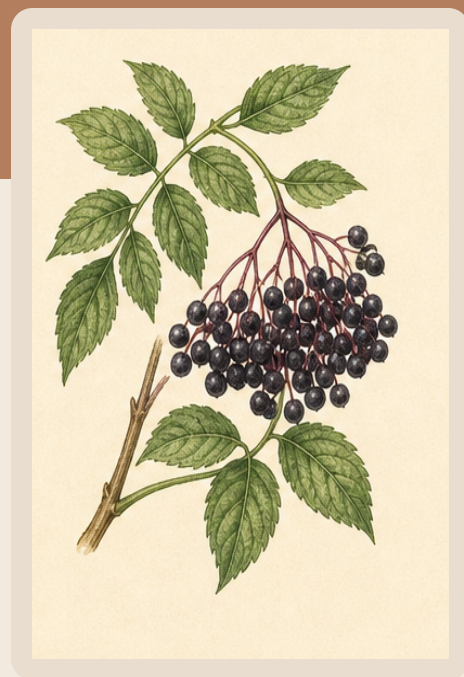
Deep purple-black berries with tart fruit character when properly cooked and prepared.

## IN THE KITCHEN

Use only correctly identified, fully cooked ripe fruit in syrups, preserves, or culinary blends. Remove stems and leaves.

## WHAT RESEARCH SUGGESTS

A few studies suggest prepared products may lessen some upper-respiratory symptoms, but strong evidence is still insufficient.



## SAFETY & PREPARATION

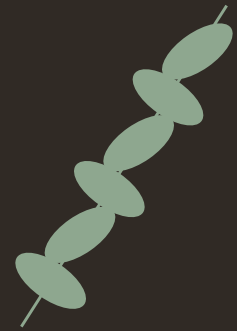
Raw or unripe berries, leaves, and stems contain cyanide-producing substances. Pregnancy, breastfeeding, and interaction data are limited.

## SOURCE

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/elderberry>

# A responsible kitchen checklist

- ☐ Correct botanical identity and plant part
- ☐ A preparation appropriate to the ingredient
- ☐ A food-level amount unless professionally guided
- ☐ Known medicine, allergy, pregnancy, and age cautions reviewed
- ☐ A clean label with ingredients, amount, and date
- ☐ Notes on aroma, flavor, preparation, and response



## Keep exploring

Visit the AshForge Herb Dictionary for twenty botanical profiles, searchable evidence snapshots, safety notes, and links to current NCCIH resources.

[ashforge.co/herb-dictionary](https://ashforge.co/herb-dictionary)