

Common Name: **Marshmallow**

Genus: *Althaea*

Species: *officinalis*

Family: Malvaceae

AKA: Moorish Mallow, Mallards, Mauls, Schloss Tea, Cheeses, Mortification Koot



## Historical Uses:

**Medical:** “Althaea but some call it Ibisus, some Althiocon, is a kind of wild mallow, ye leaves round as Cyclaminus, downy. ...for ye much virtue & divers use of it. For being sod in Melicrate or wine, or beaten of itself, it is good for wounds, ye Parotides, ye struma, Suppurations, enflamed duggs, ye griefs of seats, bruises, flatulent tumors, ye distentions of ye nerves, For it dissolves, & ripens, or breaks & brings to a Cicatix. But being sodden as is said & kneaded together with swines grease or goose grease, or turpentine, it is good in a Pessum for ye inflammations & preclusions of ye matrix, and the decoction of it performs the same, expelling also ye so-called after-purgaments.” (1)

“The leaves of the Marsh Mallow are of the power to digest, mitigate paine, and to concoct. They be with good effect mixed with fomentations and pultesses

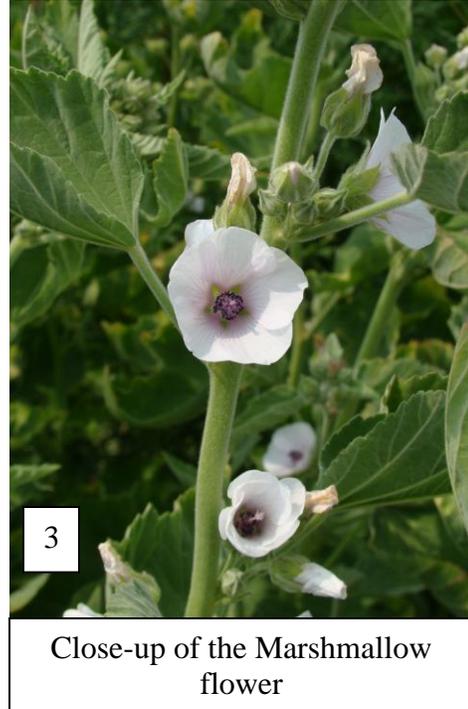


against paines of the sides, of the stone, and of the bladder, in a bath also they serve to take away any manner of paine. The roots and seeds are profitable for the same purpose: moreover the decoction of the roots helpeth the bloody flux, yet not by any binding qualitie, but by mitigating the gripings and frettings thereof: for they doe not bind at all, although Galen otherwise thought, but they cure the bloody flux, by having things added into them, as the roots of Bistort, Tormentill, the floures and rindes of Pomegranates and such like.” (2)

“It is profitably taken of them that are troubled with ruptures, cramps, or convulsions of the sinews; and boiled in white wine, for the

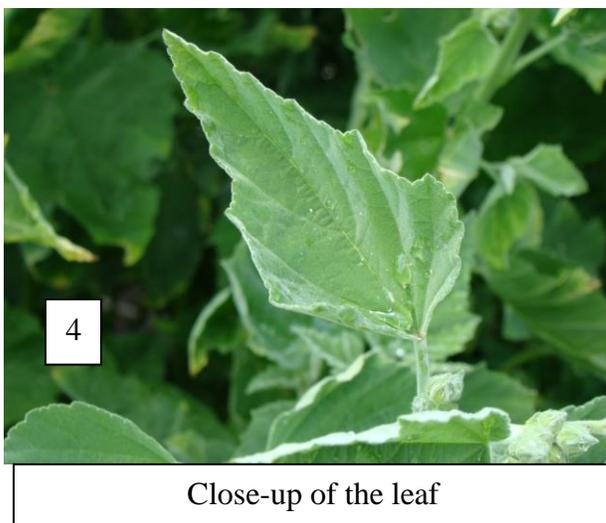
imposthumes of the throat, commonly called “The King’s Evil”, and those kernels that rise behind the ears, and inflammations or swellings in women’s breasts. The dried roots boiled in milk, and drank, is special good for the chin-cough. **Hippocrates** used to give the decoction of the roots, or the juice thereof, to drink, to those that are wounded, and ready to faint through loss of blood; and applied the same mixed with honey and rosin to the wounds.” (3)

“For gout take the plant we call hibiscus and pound it with aged lard. Lay this on the painful spot, and in three days it will be healed. Many authorities attest to the efficacy of this plant. For any accumulation of diseased matter on the body, take the same plant, simmer with fenugreek, linseed, and flour. Lay it on the sore and it will banish all hardness.” (4)



“Mallow [*babela*] is moderately cols, as is the dew, but it is colder. Let no one eat it raw, because if it is eaten raw, it is poisonous and has thick and poisonous humors in it, and brings these into the person. For those, however, who have a sick stomach, it is good cooked and eaten when it is new, clearly when it first begins to grow. Let the person make a paste, with lard added, and eat it; it helps digestion somewhat. But let whomever has a sick stomach eat it moderately so that it does not harm him or her. Let a healthy person avoid it completely.” (5)

“Leaves make poultices, baths, or decoctions for relief of pain and swelling, and to ease the passage of kidney stones. Marshmallow stops internal bleeding, and the mucilage helps to mix oils, ointments and plasters. It softens and ripens boils and carbuncles, reduces inflammation, eases joints, soreness of the womb, anal fissures, matures old ulcers, and makes a protective coating on new wounds.”(6)



**Folklore/Astrology:** Under the domain of Venus (7). Moderately hot , but drier than other mallows: the roots and seeds hereof are more dry, and of thinner parts, as **Galen** writeth; and likewise of a digesting, softening, or mollifying nature .(8)

**Other:** **Dioscorides** extols it as a remedy, and in ancient days it was not only valued as a medicine, but

was used, especially the Musk Mallow, to decorate the graves of friends. Virgil tells us of the fondness of goats for the foliage of the Mallow. (9)

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## Contemporary Uses:

**Parts Used:** Leaves, roots, flowers

**Medicinal:** “A sweet mucilaginous herb that soothes and softens tissues, has expectorant effects, and controls bacterial infections. Used internally for inflammation and ulceration of the digestive tract, hiatus hernia, bronchitis, excess mucus, asthma, whooping cough, cystitis, and for urinary tract infections. Externally for boils, abscesses, eye and skin inflammations, insect bites, splinters, minor injuries, gingivitis, mastitis, and gangrene. Peeled root is given to children to chew as an aid to teething.” (10)

**Culinary:** “Root extract may be used as a substitute for egg white in meringue, or mixed with sugar, gum Arabic, and egg white to make marshmallow candy.” (11)

“In France, the young tops and tender leaves of Marsh Mallow are eaten uncooked, in spring salads, for their property in stimulating the kidneys, a syrup being made from the roots for the same purpose.” (12)

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**Area of Origin:** Southern Europe, North Africa, and central Asia

**Physical description:** “Upright perennial with a fleshy tap root, downy stems, and velvety, round to ovate leaves.” (13)

**Plant type:** Perennial

**Height:** 3-4 ft.

**Flower color:** Pinkish-white

**Flowering period:** Summer

**Soil type/requirements:** Moist to wet soil

**Hardiness zone:** USDA 3-7

**Sun requirements:** Full sun

**Propagation:** By seed in late summer, by division in autumn

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## Bibliography

1. Dioscorides, p. 388
2. Gerard, p. 933-935
3. Culpeper, p. 91-93
4. Van Arsdall, p. 168
5. Von Bingen, p. 90-91
6. Anderson, p. 24-25
7. Culpeper, p. 91-93
8. Gerard, p. 933-935
9. Grieve, p. 507-508
10. Bown, p. 117
11. Ibid

12. Grieve, p. 507-508
13. Bown, p. 117

**Illustrations:**

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|-----------------|------|
| 1. Fuchs Herbal | 1543 |
| 2. PSUMG        | 2012 |
| 3. PSUMG        | 2012 |
| 4. PSUMG        | 2012 |