

## POT MARJORAM



*Origanum onites* (syn *Majorana onites*, *Origanum onitum*) [or-RI-ga-num]

**Family:** Labiatae

**Names:** Cretan Oregano, French Marjoram, Mediterranean Oregano, Greek Oregano, Nd, Smyrna Origanum Rigani; Mandzurána (Greek)

**Description:** Pot marjoram is a grayish-green perennial reaching 1-3 feet high, with a shrubby base. The leaves are oval and on short petioles. The whole plant is aromatic. The white flowers grow in crowded, rather flat, corymbs at the ends of branches. The bracts are in 4 rows. It blooms from April through July on dry hot ground in Attica, the Peloponnese and Crete. It is hardy to zone 8 and is not frost tender. It is in flower from July to September, and the seeds ripen from August to October. The scented flowers are hermaphrodite and are pollinated by bees. This *Origanum* species has a flavor intermediate between 'Marjoram' and 'Oregano'. It is not as sweet as 'Marjoram', is slightly bitter, but not as hot as common

commercial 'Oregano' (*Origanum vulgare hirtum*), being sometimes described as 'delicately warm'.

**Cultivation:** Cultivation: Requires a rather dry, warm, well-drained soil, but is not fussy as to soil type, thriving on chalk. Prefers slightly alkaline conditions. This species is not hardy in the colder areas of the country, it tolerates temperatures down to about 14°F. A good companion plant, improving the flavor of nearby plants. Members of this genus are rarely if ever troubled by browsing deer. Sow seed early spring at 50 - 55°F and only just cover the seed. Germination usually takes place within 2 weeks. Prick out the seedlings into individual pots when they are large enough to handle and plant them out into their permanent positions in early summer. The seed can also be sown in situ in late spring. Division in March or October. Very easy, larger divisions can be planted out direct into their permanent positions. It is better to pot up the smaller divisions and grow them on in light shade in a cold frame until they are well established before planting them out in late spring or early summer. Basal cuttings of young barren shoots in June. Very easy. Harvest the shoots with plenty of underground stem when they are about 8 - 10cm above the ground. Pot them up into individual pots and keep them in light shade in a cold frame or greenhouse until they are rooting well. Plant them out in the summer. The most common problem with growing Oregano is that at some point midway through the growing season the plant becomes woody, and tough and the flavor becomes bitter. Either cut the entire plant back close to the ground and a new flush of fresh foliage will appear in a couple of weeks, or wait until the flower heads have formed and use these. It's a good idea to

have at least 2 Oregano plants so you can cut one back and still have one to use fresh. The leaves are harvested in the summer and can be used fresh or dried

**Properties:** Antiseptic; Antispasmodic; Carminative; Cholagogue; Diaphoretic; Emmenagogue; Expectorant; Stimulant; Stomachic; Tonic.

**Culinary Uses:** It enhances the flavor of meats and fish. It is one of the flavorings used in the candy, "Turkish Delight." The leaves are eaten fresh or cooked. They are used as a flavoring for salad dressings, vegetables and legumes and are best added in the final stages of cooking. A strong thyme-like aroma, the leaves are used as a substitute for oregano or marjoram, but they are inferior in flavor. A slightly bitter flavor that lasts longer in cooked dishes. A herb tea is made from the leaves.

**Other Uses:** An essential oil from the leaves is used as a food flavoring and in perfumery. The leaves and flowering stems are added to potpourri and scented articles. The plant is often used to disinfect bee hives.

#### **Old Rose and Lavender Potpourri**

- 1/2 cup rose petals
- 1/2 cup lavender blossoms
- 1/2 cup sweet woodruff
- 1/2 cup pot marjoram leaves and blossoms
- 1/4 cup mint
- 2 teaspoons orange peel
- 2 teaspoons whole cloves
- 1/2 teaspoon crushed cinnamon stick
- 2 drops each of lavender and rose oils
- 1/2 teaspoon powdered orrisroot

Combine the first eight ingredients. Sprinkle the oils and the orrisroot over the dry ingredients and mix well. Place in a covered jar, and stir gently every few days for a month, until the scents have blended and mellowed. Remove the jar's cover to freshen a room, but be sure to replace the cover between times of use. All potpourris need time to recoup their scents. The above recipe will also work well in sachets.

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