

***Origanum syriacum* L.**  
Labiatae



Compiled by: Prof. F. M. Hammouda, Prof. S. I. Ismail,  
Dr. N. S. Abdel-Azim and Dr. K. A. Shams  
Edited by: Prof. K. H. Batanouny  
Photo by K. H. Batanouny

■ **Morphological Description**

Perennial herbs, tomentose low shrub 40-90 cm. high, with erect stems, much branched. Leaves are broadly ovate, entire, palmate-veined, obtuse, the basal rounded, nearly sessile, densely hairy. Bracts are small, 4-ranked, white canescent. Flowers heads are often cylindrical, in terminal spikes, paniced, with characteristic aromatic odour (of thyme smell) and taste. The plant in Egypt represents *v. aegyptiacum* (L.), more spreadingly hairy and less grey than the type.

■ **Geographical Distribution**

**Local:** Sinai.

**Regional:** North only in Egypt.

**Global:** Native to the Middle East.

■ **Ecology**

The plant is rare and grows in the mountains of Sinai in rocky habitats. It is common in dry temperate regions.

■ **Status**

The plant is vulnerable. It is collected for medicinal use and to prepare hot tea, and is considered in need of conservation; both in situ and ex situ. The type of *Origanum moru* var. *sinaicum* was collected on mountains of Sinai, 13 June 1835, Schimper 385 (K.). The plant is endemic.

■ **Part(s) Used**

The leaves or the whole herb.

***Origanum syriacum* L.**

Sp.Pl., ed. 1, 590 (1753), *Majorna syriaca*, *Origanum moru* Boiss.

**Names**

**Arabic:** Za`ater, Bardaqaash بردقوش، زعتر

**English:** Marjoram, Origanum, Sweet marjoram, Knotted marjoram, Bible hyssop.

**French:** Marjolaine d'Orient, Marjolaine.

■ **Collection**

The leaves and flowering tops are collected when the plant is in late flowering stage.

■ **Preparations**

Infusion, hot tea, dry leaves.

■ **Use**

Oral.

■ **Constituents**

The herb contains volatile oil consisting of more than 80 carvacrols, resins and flavonoids.

■ **Pharmacological Action and Toxicity**

The infusion has an agreeable flavour and is often used by herbalists to treat pulmonary diseases. Hyssop is commonly combined with horehound to ease sore throats, and to treat asthma and bronchitis. Acute inflammatory conditions of the respiratory system are best treated with herbs that soothe the inflamed tissue rather than strong expectorants. This approach of cough therapy is said to rapidly ameliorate symptoms and shorten the duration of respiratory illness. A basic herbal tea for coughs would contain coltsfoot (*Tussilago farfara*), marsh-mallow (*Althea officinalis*), hyssop (*Hyssop officinalis*), licorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) and aniseed (*Pimpinella anisum*).

A few cases of toxicity resulting from ingestion of hyssop essential oil have been reported. The clinical symptoms of hyssop toxicity include convulsive seizures that resemble epileptic fits and vomiting, and may develop within a few minutes to two

hours. The commercially available essential oil of hyssop contains pinocamphone and isopinocampone, which may be responsible for the neurotoxicity. Injections of a relatively low dosage of these drugs (0.02 mL/kg ) proved to be lethal in rats .

### ■ Pharmacopoeia

Not available

### ■ Phytopharmaceutical Products

Not available

### ■ Traditional Medicine and Indigenous Knowledge

**History:** The name Hyssopus was used by Hippocrates derived from the Hebrew word ezob meaning 'holy herb'. It is mentioned in the Old Testament where the herb was used for purification, yet could also possibly refer to *Origanum syriacum*. Already well known in ancient times, it was referred to in the Bible for its cleansing effect in connection with plague, leprosy and chest ailments. Hyssop was used for purifying sacred places and as a strewing herb in the Middle Ages to ward off lice. Dry leaves were used as a spice, condiment and to relieve pain.

### ■ Traditional Medicinal Uses

- Anti-rheumatic
- Antiseptic
- Antispasmodic
- Carminative
- Cicatrizant
- Digestive
- Diuretic
- Emmenagogue
- Expectorant
- Nervine
- Sedative
- Stimulant
- Tonic and vulnerary

**Other uses of the plant:** The flowers and leaves can be used as flavouring agents in teas, tonics and sweets, and as spices in cooking. The essential oil has been used in perfumes. The fresh herb is used with sesame seeds and olive oil to make a special dish.

### ■ References

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