

F E V E R F E W

T A N A C E T U M P A R T H E N I U M



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## CULTURAL & HISTORICAL NOTES ...

Native to southeastern Europe, feverfew has been revered for centuries for its medicinal and protective qualities. Its name, derived from the Latin febrifugia, meaning “fever reducer,” reflects its long-standing use in treating fevers, headaches, and inflammation. The Greek physician Dioscorides documented feverfew’s healing properties as early as the 1st century CE, referring to it as a remedy for “all hot inflammations.” Throughout the Middle Ages, feverfew was widely cultivated in European gardens, where it was not only valued for its therapeutic uses but also planted near doorways to ward off disease. Its strong scent was believed to purify the air and protect households from the plague.

Traditionally, feverfew played a role in folk medicine as a cure for “elf-shot,” an old term used to describe unexplained pains believed to be caused by mischievous spirits. Beyond its medicinal and folkloric significance, feverfew was also recognized as a natural pest repellent, commonly interplanted in gardens to deter unwanted insects. As a dye plant, feverfew produces soft golden-yellow, colorfast tones from its flowers and greenish-yellow hues from its leaves and stems. When used with alum, it creates warm yellow shades, while iron mordants shift the color toward earthy greens. Its historical use as a natural dye, particularly in European textile traditions, made it a versatile plant for both healing and artistic expression. This dual-purpose herb—valued for its healing, protective, and garden-friendly properties—continues to be cherished by herbalists, gardeners, and natural dyers alike.

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**PARTS USED**  
Leaves and flowers

**GERMINATION**  
7-14 days

**USDA ZONES**  
4-9

**LIGHT**  
Full sun to partial shade

**HARVEST**  
90–100 days after  
sowing

**SOIL**  
Well-drained, average  
to sandy soil; neutral  
to slightly alkaline pH  
(7.0–7.5)

**WATERING**  
Moderate; allow soil to dry  
between waterings



## HOW TO GROW...

**Sowing:** Direct sow feverfew seeds in early spring after the danger of frost has passed, or start indoors 4–6 weeks before the last frost. Lightly press seeds into the soil, as they require light to germinate. Keep soil consistently moist until germination occurs.

**Transplanting:** Once seedlings develop their second set of true leaves and are 3–4 inches tall, harden them off and transplant them outdoors, spacing plants 12–18 inches apart. Feverfew prefers well-drained soil and full sun but can tolerate partial shade.

**Maintenance:** Deadhead spent flowers regularly to encourage continuous blooming. Feverfew is a hardy perennial that may self-seed freely in the garden if not controlled. It thrives in poor soil conditions and requires little fertilization. Cut back stems in late fall to promote healthy regrowth in spring.

**Pest and Disease Management:** Feverfew is generally pest-resistant but may occasionally attract aphids or spider mites. Neem oil or insecticidal soap can help manage infestations. It is also susceptible to powdery mildew in humid conditions, so ensure proper spacing for airflow.

*Note: Feverfew is a hardy, self-seeding perennial that thrives in poor soil conditions with minimal care. Regular deadheading encourages continuous blooms, but allowing some flowers to go to seed ensures natural propagation for the following season. Its drought tolerance makes it an excellent choice for low-maintenance herb and pollinator gardens.*

## DYE TECHNIQUES TO TRY ...

Use fresh or dried flower heads for dyeing; simmer at low temperatures (160–180°F) for an hour to extract color.

Alum mordant enhances golden tones, while iron mordant shifts the color to olive-green.

Combine with weld or coreopsis for deeper yellows and layered botanical prints. Rinsing. Combining Dyer's Chamomile with other natural dyes, such as indigo, can yield a range of colors, including greens.

## REFERENCES/LEARN MORE ...

Royal Horticultural Society – Growing Feverfew  
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