

Take 2 Teaspoons and Call Me In the Morning
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Christina Lacie

Are the pressures of the holiday season getting to you? Try this: steep two teaspoons of chamomile tea in a cup of hot water, sit back, sip and enjoy. Growing your own supply of this calming herbal tea is far less stressful than what the holidays bring and it is a proposal worthy of contemplation.

Nicknamed “Dr. Plant,” Chamomile (AKA *Matricaria recutita*), a relative of the daisy, has come to the aid of those seeking to calm nerves or to add its mojo to soaps, shampoos and perfumes. But Chamomile helps other plants as well. The tea can be sprayed on propagation flats to help prevent damping off (a fungal disease affecting seeds and seedlings). Adding chamomile tea to the water of cut flowers helps them stay fresh longer. Sounds too good to be true doesn't it? The best part is that Chamomile is easy to grow.

German chamomile is the variety used for tea. It grows to about 2 ft high and 1 ½ ft wide. The plant appreciates full sun and a well drained, slightly sandy soil. Keep the plants moist, not soggy. Seeds can be started early indoors, or sown later in the spring outdoors after the danger of frost has passed (or ask your nursery to order some starts for you). It takes about 80- 90 days until harvest. The daisy-like flowers of the chamomile plant are used for tea, NOT the leaves: they are BITTER, yuck. When the plant begins to bloom, it is best to harvest the flowers **daily** (preferably before noon) and set them to dry indoors on raised window screening for good air circulation. Continue to pick the flowers daily (which also encourages new blooms). One plant can produce about 3-6 cups of flowers. One cup of flowers equals about ¼ cup of dried flowers. You will know they are dried when the flowers crush easily. Store them in an airtight container.

It's a good time to decide on gardening projects worthy of pursuing this spring. Perhaps this time next year, you will be sipping home-grown Chamomile. Ahhhh, what a comforting thought.

NOTE: Yard and Garden Lectures begin January 14th. Call 379-1172 for info. There will be a special bonus talk this year by Cisco.