

Tansy

(Tanacetum vulgare)

History shows that tansy was a favorite herb in the psychic garden at a Swiss monastery in the year 1000. It also was a favorite in the gardens of Charlemagne. In ancient societies tansy was a symbol of everlasting life, and sprigs were placed in coffins to repel insects and preserve the dead. A Greek man, Ganymede, was given tansy so he could become immortal and eternally bear the cup of Zeus. Grow a lush tansy plant at the edge of a garden path - just brushing against the plant will release a strong fragrance. The plant's yellow flowers retain their color when dried, so it is a popular addition to arrangements.

Culinary uses

Tansy has a strong, bitter, somewhat peppery flavor. It is one of the bitter herbs included in the Passover feast. Rub tansy onto meat, toss into scrambled eggs and pancake batter, or stew with rhubarb.

Other uses

Because leaves of tansy repel insects, the plant can be very helpful in fruit orchards. Hang a bunch in the house to ward off flies, and sprinkle crushed leaves to repel ants and mice. Because it contains significant amounts of potassium, tansy is a valuable addition to a compost heap.

Cultivation

Tansy grows best in full sun to partial shade in soil that is not too wet. It can be grown from seed, or divided, then thinned or transplanted to 2 to 3 feet apart. Because it spreads rapidly, tansy does not do well indoors.