

## Thymus

Thyme (/tʰaɪm/) is the herb (dried aerial parts) of some members of the genus *Thymus* of aromatic perennial evergreen herbs in the mint family Lamiaceae. Thymes are relatives of the oregano genus *Origanum*, with both plants being mostly indigenous to the Mediterranean region. Thymes have culinary, medicinal, and ornamental uses, and the species most commonly cultivated and used for culinary purposes is *Thymus vulgaris*.

Thyme is indigenous to the Mediterranean region.[1] Wild thyme grows in the Levant, where it might have been first cultivated. Ancient Egyptians used thyme for embalming.[2] The ancient Greeks used it in their baths and burnt it as incense in their temples, believing it was a source of courage. The spread of thyme throughout Europe was thought to be due to the Romans, as they used it to purify their rooms and to "give an aromatic flavour to cheese and liqueurs".[3] In the European Middle Ages, the herb was placed beneath pillows to aid sleep and ward off nightmares.[4] In this period, women also often gave knights and warriors gifts that included thyme leaves, as it was believed to bring courage to the bearer. Thyme was also used as incense and placed on coffins during funerals, as it was supposed to assure passage into the next life.[5]

The name of the genus of fish *Thymallus*, first given to the grayling (*T. thymallus*, described in the 1758 edition of *Systema Naturae* by Swedish zoologist Carl Linnaeus), originates from the faint smell of thyme that emanates from the flesh.[6]

Thyme is best cultivated in a hot, sunny location with well-drained soil. It is generally planted in the spring, and thereafter grows as a perennial. It can be propagated by seed, cuttings, or dividing rooted sections of the plant. It tolerates drought well.[7] The plant can take deep freezes and is found growing wild on mountain highlands. It grows well on dry slopes and is propagated by cuttings. It can be pruned after flowering to keep from getting woody.[8]

Gas chromatographic analysis reveals that the most abundant volatile component of thyme leaves is thymol 8.55 mg/g. Other components are carvacrol, linalool,  $\alpha$ -terpineol, and 1,8-cineole. Several are also found in basil. Some exhibit antioxidant properties.[9]

In some Levantine countries, the condiment za'atar (Arabic for both thyme and marjoram) contains many of the essential oils found in thyme.[10] Thyme is a common component of the bouquet garni, and of herbes de Provence.[11]

Thyme is sold both fresh and dried. While summer-seasonal, fresh greenhouse thyme is often available year-round. The fresh form is more flavourful but also less convenient; storage life is rarely more than a week. However, the fresh form can last many months if carefully frozen.[12]

Fresh thyme is commonly sold in bunches of sprigs. A sprig is a single stem snipped from the plant.[13] It is composed of a woody stem with paired leaf or flower clusters ("leaves") spaced 15 to 25 millimetres (1/2 to 1 inch) apart. A recipe may measure thyme by the bunch (or fraction thereof), or by the sprig, or by the tablespoon or teaspoon. Dried thyme is widely used in Armenia in tisanes (called urc).

Depending on how it is used in a dish, the whole sprig may be used (e.g., in a bouquet garni), or the leaves removed and the stems discarded. Usually, when a recipe mentions a bunch or sprig, it means the whole form; when it mentions spoons, it means the leaves. It is perfectly

acceptable to substitute dried for whole thyme.

Leaves may be removed from stems either by scraping with the back of a knife, or by pulling through the fingers or tines of a fork.

Thyme retains its flavour on drying better than many other herbs.[14]

Oil of thyme, the essential oil of common thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*), contains 20–54% thymol.[15] Thyme essential oil also contains a range of additional compounds, such as p-cymene, myrcene, borneol, and linalool.[16] Thymol, an antiseptic, is an active ingredient in various commercially produced mouthwashes, such as Listerine.[17] Before the advent of modern antibiotics, oil of thyme was used to medicate bandages.[3]

