

MEADOWSWEET



By Sten Porse

Scientific name

Filipendula ulmaria

Common names

Bridewort, Dolloff, Meadsweet, Meadowwort, Queen/Lady of the Meadow

Where found

Native to Europe, and now also found in North America and North Asia.

Therapeutic ingredient

Salicin

Used to treat

Fever, pain and inflammation, and taken in small daily doses may prevent heart attack and stroke.

Meadowsweet was among the ancient Druids' most sacred herbs, although no one knows if they used it as a remedy. In the Middle Ages, it was used to flavour mead, an alcoholic beverage made from honey. In Europe, it is still used as a flavouring for food.

Known by many names, in Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale* it is known as Meadwort and was one of the ingredients in a drink called 'save.' It was also known as Bridewort, because it was strewn in churches for festivals and weddings, and often made into bridal garlands. In Europe, it took its name 'queen of the meadow' for the way it can dominate a low-lying, damp meadow. In the 16th century, when it was customary to strew floors with rushes and herbs (both to give warmth underfoot and to overcome smells and infections), it was a favourite of Queen Elizabeth I, who preferred it above all other strewing herbs.

Anti-inflammatory chemicals, called salicylates, were first extracted from the plant in the 1830s. In 1897 a pharmacist named Felix Hoffmann created a synthetically altered version of salicin, derived from meadowsweet, which caused less digestive upset than pure salicylic acid. The new drug – Acetylsalicylic acid – was named 'aspirin' by Hoffman's employer, the German chemical and pharmaceutical company Bayer, after the old botanical name for meadowsweet, *Spiraea ulmaria*.