

SOLE FOOD A sprig of mint and a wedge of lemon may make lovely garnishes for your julep or main course, but they can also soothe the achy feet. "The mint naturally calms down irritated muscle fibers," says Tori Hudson, a naturopathic physician, and the astringent lemon can brighten your toenails.



The Sole of a Woman

Give us your tired feet, your poor insteps, your huddled toes yearning to breathe free. Now liberate them in a bath of lemon-mint or chamomile-mustard seed. **BY ANDREA DAWN CLARK**



THE AVERAGE PERSON TAKES 8,000 TO 10,000 STEPS a day, according to the American Podiatric Medical Association—115,000 miles over a lifetime, enough steps to walk around the earth four times. But even with all that walking, most of us tend to neglect and abuse our feet, getting a pedicure once every leap year and squeezing into shoes that look gorgeous but feel torturous. "It's not like that where I'm from," says Brigitte Mansfield, owner of the new Brigitte Mansfield >

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERICKA MCCONNELL



FLOWER POWER While chamomile oil has a soft floral scent, its effects are quite powerful. "It's considered one of the most calming essential oils and also reduces swelling in sore feet," says Hudson.

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European Spa in New York. "I grew up in Switzerland and Germany, and we used to take special footbaths to comfort our feet all the time. They're easy to do, they feel wonderful, and they're very healthy for you."

Eight years ago, when Mansfield was in labor with her first child, she felt a migraine coming on. To avoid giving her medication, her European-trained doctor prescribed a chamomile-mustard seed footbath. "This type of footbath—which is part of a long-standing European tradition—can soothe anyone, but it's particularly helpful for people with migraines," says Tori Hudson, a naturopathic physician and a professor at the National College of Naturopathic Medicine in Portland, Oregon.

"What you're feeling when you have a headache is most likely throbbing, dilated blood vessels and nerve inflammation in your head. The warm water and mustard seed, which has heating qualities, draw blood away from the head to the feet." Health benefits aside, inhaling the delicate aroma of chamomile oil could relax anyone.

A lemon-mint footbath has the opposite effect—instead of warming and calming your body, it cools and invigorates it. "Mint is a natural refrigerant," Hudson says, which makes this soak the perfect post-workout, post-long-hard-day-at-the-office footbath. There's also the pleasure of sliding your toes over smooth rocks while you take in the refreshing scent of fresh mint leaves and lemon slices. ■

CHAMOMILE-MUSTARD SEED FOOTBATH

1. Pour comfortably hot water into a basin.
2. Add one teaspoon of freshly ground mustard seed for every gallon of warm water.
3. Add three to four drops of chamomile oil (such as the one shown at left, from Aroma Terra, \$58) for every half-gallon of water.
4. Place a few fresh chamomile flowers in the basin and swoosh the water between your fingers to fully blend the mixture.
5. Soak your feet in the water—with a thick towel over the basin (to retain the heat)—for about 20 minutes.
6. Take your feet out of the bowl and, with upward strokes, massage in a mixture of your favorite lotion infused with a few drops of chamomile oil.

LEMON-MINT FOOTBATH

1. Cover the bottom of a basin with flat, smooth stones. (We used Lucky River stones from Chelsea Garden Center Home, \$17.)
 2. Fill the basin with lukewarm water.
 3. Add three or four drops of peppermint oil (like the one shown on the previous page, from Aroma Terra, \$26) for every half-gallon of water. Then swirl your hand in the water to distribute the oil evenly.
 4. Slice one whole lemon and drop the slices into the water.
 5. Grab two handfuls of fresh peppermint or spearmint leaves, gently rub them together to release their natural oils, and add them to the bath.
 6. Slide your feet into the basin. Deeply breathe in the lemon-and-mint aroma while massaging your feet over the slippery stones for at least four minutes.
- For details see *Shop Guide*.