

## **Excerpts from Macer Floridus**

The [Macer Floridus](#) is a herbal that was extremely popular throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in all of Europe, and especially in Germany. It was most likely written in the mid-eleventh century by Odo of Meung, but this is somewhat uncertain and the early version could date from as early as the ninth century. Its final form of 77 chapters, drawing on material from Constantinus Africanus, certainly existed by 1100. We know with certainty that it was not authored by the classical Roman writer [Aemilius Macer](#) to whom early editors ascribed it.

The Macer is a relatively brief treatment of the pharmaceutical properties of various plants, drawing on various classical and medieval sources. It does not contain culinary recipes, but some remarks in it are nonetheless interesting from that perspective. I excerpted several paragraphs I found interesting with a view to culinary preparation, feasting, and lifestyle medicine. It should not need saying that these are not medical recommendations. While some recipes in Macer may actually have an appreciable effect, others can be seriously dangerous, and none hold up to modern evidence-based practice.

I am relying on the [scholarly edition of 1834](#) and a German translation by Johannes Gottfried Mayer and Konrad Goehl that is [still in print](#).

### Wormwood (*absinthium*)

71 If you pound the herb with strong wine, you need not fear midges. If you burn it, they flee its smell.

93 Its ash blackens the hair if mixed into a wax ointment and frequently applied

105 If you dissolve you ink in wine this plant (absinthium) was steeped in and write on parchment, no mouse will gnaw it.

### Nettle (*urtica*)

142 Used as a pessary together with myrrh, it provokes the menses. If the womb, heavy with humours, closes the vulva, it is recalled by rubbing it with nettle leaves. Drunk in wine, it provokes the seed of Venus, and more so if it is pounded with honey and pepper and taken thus.

### Broadleaf plantain (*plantago*)

227 If this herb is often ground between the teeth (chewed), it drives back swollen and blood-filled gums, and it often also drives out toothache

Rue (*ruta*)

323 Take in equal quantities soda ash (nitrum), pepper, and cumin (cyminum) and as much rue as all three of these. You must first soak the cumin in sour wine and fry it on hot iron. All three are then well pounded and mixed with honey. If you enjoy of this antidote often, it will heal the pain of your chest and sides, liver and kidneys, it dilutes the gall, softens a hard belly without causing it to rumble (sine tormine), comforts the stomach and enables it to digest food well.

Dill (*anethum*)

425 Boiling the flower in oil makes it a curative that is especially effective against harm done by frost, which often reins in headaches and relieves tension of the muscles, and drives out coldness (frigora).

Betony (*betonica*)

490 It is also said that if you often enjoy betony in wine, a leaden (plumbeus) skin tone departs and the previous better tone returns.

Leek (*porrum*)

548 If eaten raw, it relieves drunkenness, provokes lust, and softens a hardened womb and abdomen.

Chamomile (*chamomilla*)

570 It also removes scaly skin and moles on the face if you lay it on pounded, on its own or with honey

Catnip (*nepeta*)

596 The dried herb, taken in lukewarm honey wine (mulsa), usually purifies the entire body through sweat.

Fennel (*feniculum*)

706 The seed, drunk with wine, provokes the act of Venus.

Rose (*rosa*)

785 Powdered, dried rose alleviates illnesses of the mouth, both on its own and mixed with honey.

803 Experienced Palladius writes on this: Take of the red petals alone, clean an ounce of this and mix it with a pound of olive oil. Close it up in a glass vessel and expose it to the sun for seven days. Then keep it, it has many medicinal properties.

#### Lily (*lilium*)

836 The bulb, boiled and well mixed with a wax ointment, smooths wrinkles on the face, removes all blemishes from the skin, drives out scabies, and cleans the face of scaly skin.

#### Savory (*satureia*)

860 Taken well pounded with wine or an egg, it calms nausea. Similarly, it also provokes the act of Venus if taken fresh or dried with plenty of wine. If the wine is also mixed with honey and pepper, this herb is said to kindle the fire of love more ardently than normal.

#### Sage (*salvia*)

881 The juice of sage, it is said, blackens the hair if you often anoint it under the warm sun.

#### Rocket (*eruca*)

1020 Mixed with honey, it is said to clear the skin of blemishes and the face of moles.

1033 Many physicians and poets confirm that this herb greatly strengthens Venus. It is most salubrious if taken together with lettuce because the heat is tempered by its coolness.

#### Onion (*cepa*)

1112 You heal soreness of the feet caused by hard soles of your shoes with its juice, mixed with chicken fat, if you anoint them frequently.

1125 Its juice, mixed with honey, makes dim eyes see brightly, and mixed with vinegar, it removes blemishes of the skin, but you must rub it on often.

#### Bugloss (*buglossa*)

1137 Its decoction is said to produce joyful gatherings if sprinkled among the guests.

#### Oregano (*origanum*)

1307 Its juice, if mixed with onions and sumach and exposed to the sun when Sirius burns, exposed to the hot air for fourteen days, if placed under the bed is said to drive out all harmful small creatures.

### Violet (*viola*)

1375 Oil is produced from violets the same way as from rose flowers. It is useful in many illnesses ... you can also drive out dandruff of the head with this oil.

### Iris (*iris*)

1485 If you mix three parts of powder of white hellebore with two parts of iris root (orrisroot) and bind them with honey, applying this plaster cleans the face of moles and drives away scaly skin.

### Hyssop (*ysopum*)

1504 Its decoction, prepared by boiling honey and dried figs with it, is of no little help to sufferers from catarrh if they drink of it. If you hold this decoction in your mouth and move it against the palate, it makes a rough voice fair again.

1518 A drink of hyssop, fresh or dried, taken often is said to give the face an exceedingly beautiful colour.

1528 Boiled and laid on the skin, it softens all blemishes of the skin (*livores*).

### Mint (*mentha*)

1581 If its juice is applied to the womb from below before coitus, the woman will not conceive.

1583 Its juice aids small cheeses not to rot if it is added or the green herb is placed upon the cheese.

### Sedge (*cyperus*)

1594 It aids the viciousness of the armpits (*alarum vitiis*) if mixed with oil.

### Vervain (*verbena*)

1878 Its decoction, made in wine, makes happy guests if sprinkled among a gathering like bugloss described above

### Mallow (*malva*)

1974 It (the root) is also said to stimulate Venus if it is tied on next to the thigh with linen.

### Hemlock (*cicuta*)

2045 Anaxilaos teaches us this: If a maiden at the time that her breasts begin to swell frequently anoints them with the juice of hemlock, they will always remain of moderate size and upright. And if you lay the green herb, pounded, on the breasts, it suppresses lactation.

It dampens the desire of Venus and suppresses all seminal flow if you cover the pubes with a plaster of hemlock often enough.

Pepper (*piper*)

2059 For it has become known more through cookery than medicine

2060 Its virtue is said to be warming and drying, each in the third degree. There are three kinds of pepper, white pepper, long pepper, and black pepper. Yet as physicians (i.e. the medical authorities) only know of two kinds, I will say what I know of black pepper.

Eaten raw, cooked, or mixed with honey, in all cases it supports the digestive power of the stomach and the liver.

2077 Mixed with natron and applied as a plaster, it softens all skin blemishes.

Galingale (*galanga*)

2129 An odor of the mouth that passes the normal measure is alleviated by eating it.

2130 It warms the loins and aids the powers of Venus.

Ceodary (*zeodary*)

2139 It drives from the mouth the odour produced by garlic, and no less that by drinking wine in excess.

Cloves (*gariofilus*)

2145 It kindles the powers of Venus if it is drunk in the weight of a drachm dissolved in fresh cow milk.

Cinnamon (*cinnamum*)

2158 Pounded well and mixed with strong vinegar, it removes ugly moles if you lay it on the face.

Costus (*costus*)

2176 (Both kinds of costus root) clear the face of moles if they are applied pounded with honey. Finally, if drunk with lukewarm honey wine (*mulsum*), they are said to provoke Venus.

Spikenard (*spica*)

2194 They excite Venus if drunk in reduced grape must (*sapae liquore*)

Frankincense (*thus*)

2228 If anyone chews it together with oregano, it drives out all evil humours from the head through spitting and coughing. Further, this purification of the head lightens a heavy tongue.

Aloeswood (*aloe*)

2252 The tongue, gums, and all illnesses of the mouth are helped if it is pounded well with honey and wine.

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