

**Mentha spicata L. (Lamiaceae)**  
**Spearmint**

**Description.** Rhizomatous perennials, strongly aromatic; stems 30-120 cm tall, ascending to erect, glabrous to glandular. Leaves opposite, sessile to short-petiolate, the petioles 1-3 mm long, the blades 3-9 cm long, 0.7-3 cm wide, elliptic to broadly lanceolate or narrowly ovate, glabrous to hirsute on the veins below, margins sharply serrate, apices acute to acuminate, the bases rounded to subcordate. Inflorescences terminal, 3-12 cm long, simple to branched, slender and spike-like, composed of dense clusters subtended by bracts, the bracts 3-7 mm long, narrowly lanceolate to linear. Calyx radial, 1-3 mm long, tube glandular, the lobes triangular, ciliate; corolla somewhat radial, the 5 lobes subequal to equal, 2-4 mm long, white to pale lavender; stamens 4, equal; ovary superior, 4 lobed, the style slightly exerted. Fruit breaking into 4 nutlets. In California, flowering from June to October (Brooks 1986, Clapham et al. 1962, Cronquist and Reveal 1984, Abrams 1944, Gleason and Cronquist 1991, Wilken 1993, Munz 1959).

**Geographic distribution.** A native of Europe, spearmint has become naturalized throughout much of warm-temperate North America (uncommon in central North America), Australia, New Zealand, southern Africa, and Hawaii. (Arnold and de Wet 1993, Brooks 1993, Chapman 1991, Munz 1959, Wagner et al. 1990, Webb et al. 1988).

Spearmint had become widely naturalized (but only locally distributed) in California by the end of the 19th century (Robbins 1940). It has been reported from Santa Catalina and Santa Cruz islands (Junak et al. 1997) and is widely scattered throughout California (Anonymous 1998, Wilken 1993).

**Reproductive and vegetative biology:** Related species and other Lamiaceae with small, protandrous flowers are generally pollinated by small beetles (Coleoptera) and flies (Diptera). (Faegri and van der Pijl 1966, Proctor et al. 1996). No other literature pertinent to its reproductive or vegetative biology was found.

**Ecological distribution.** Spearmint usually occurs in wet sites of ditchbanks and streamsides (Brooks 1986, Clapham et al. 1962, Cronquist and Reveal 1984, Munz 1959).

**Weed status.** *Mentha spicata* is not considered a noxious weed in agricultural or horticultural practice, at least at a global level (not listed by Holm et al. 1977), nor is it considered a noxious weed by the State Dept. of Food and Agriculture (Anonymous 1996). It is not listed for the United States in Lorenzi and Jeffery (1987).

**Microbial pathogens.** *Mentha spicata* appears to be resistant to several fungal pathogens, including *Corynespora* and *Fusarium* (Shukla and Singh 1997, Singh et al. 1994), but excluding *Puccinia menthae* (Johnson 1995, Larous and Losel 1993, Venkatramesh 1989). Resistance to some pathogenic fungi and other forms of anti-microbial activity appears related to presence of certain essential oils (Mueller-Riebau et al. 1995, Sivropoulou et al. 1995).

**Insect pathogens.** Nematodes (*Meloidogyne*) are principal pathogens of cultivated spearmint (Shukla and Haseeb 1996), but variation in resistance has been reported by Walker (1996) and Walker and Melin (1995).

**Herbicide control.** No literature specific to spearmint was found. The related species, *Mentha piperita* (peppermint) has been controlled by a combination of herbicides, including atrazine, bromacil, simazine, or tebuthiuron; spot treatment has been achieved by mixtures of 2,4-D and dicamba (Lorenzi and Jeffery 1987). Stanger (1987) evaluated tolerance of spearmint to several herbicides in the control of other weeds in Oregon spearmint crop fields.

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