



## Aloysia citrodora

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*Aloysia citrodora* is a species of flowering plant in the verbena family *Verbenaceae*, native to western South America. Common names include lemon verbena and lemon beebrush. It was brought to Europe by the Spanish and the Portuguese in the 17th century and cultivated for its oil.

### Description

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Lemon verbena is a perennial shrub or subshrub growing to 2–3 m high. The 8-cm-long, glossy, pointed leaves are slightly rough to the touch and emit a powerful scent reminiscent of lemon when bruised (hence the Latin specific epithet *citrodora*—lemon-scented).

Sprays of tiny purple or white flowers appear in late spring or early summer. It is sensitive to cold, losing leaves at temperatures below 0 °C (32 °F), although the wood is hardy to −10 °C (14 °F).

Due to its many culinary uses, it is widely listed and marketed as a plant for the herb garden.

### Uses

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Lemon verbena leaves are used to add a lemon flavor to fish and poultry dishes, vegetable marinades, salad dressings, jams, puddings, Greek yogurt and beverages. It also is used to make herbal teas, or added to standard tea in place of actual lemon (as is common with Moroccan tea). It can also be used to make a sorbet.

### Chemistry

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The major isolates in lemon verbena oil are citral (30–35%), nerol and geraniol. Extracts of lemon verbena also contain verbascoside.

## Synonyms

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Synonyms for lemon verbena are *Verbena triphylla* L'Hér., *Verbena citriodora* Cav., *Lippia triphylla*, *Lippia citriodora*, *Aloysia citriodora* (Cav.) Ort. hierba luisa, cedron

## Garden history

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The first European botanist who publicly noticed this plant was the French Philibert Commerson, who collected in Buenos Aires on his botanical circumnavigation with Bougainville, about 1767. The plant had already been quietly imported directly into the Real Jardín Botánico de Madrid, where in 1797 professors Casimiro Gómez Ortega and Antonio Palau y Verdera named it, though they did not yet effectively publish it, *Aloysia citrodora* in Latin and "Hierba de la Princesa" in Spanish, to compliment Maria Louisa of Parma, Princess of Asturias the wife of the Garden's patron Infante Carlos de Borbon, Prince of Asturias and son of king Carlos III. The name was later effectively published in the first volume of Palau's *Parte Práctica de Botánica* in 1784.

Unofficial importations from Spanish America seldom fared well: when another French botanist Joseph Dombey landed his collections at Cadiz in 1785 they were impounded and left to rot in warehouses, while he was refused permission even to have seeds planted. Among the bare handful of plants Dombey had assembled during eight years at Lima, lemon verbena survived

Meanwhile, Gómez Ortega sent seeds and specimens of the plant to Charles Louis L'Héritier de Brutelle in Paris; L'Héritier published it as *Verbena triphylla* in the second fascicle his *Stirpes Novae*. published in December 1785 or January 1786. From Paris John Sibthorpe, professor of Botany at Oxford, obtained the specimen that he introduced to British horticulture: by 1797 lemon verbena was common in greenhouses around London, and its popularity as essential in a fragrant bouquet increased through the following century.



# Aloysia citriodora

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La verbena odorosa (*Aloysia citriodora*) è una pianta arbustiva della famiglia delle Verbenaceae. Da non confondere con la "verbena comune" (*Verbena officinalis*).

## Etimologia

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Il nome del genere (*Aloysia*) è un omaggio a Maria Luisa di Parma (1751-1819), moglie di Carlo IV di Spagna. L'epiteto specifico *citriodora* deriva dal latino e significa *dal profumo di limone*.

## Descrizione

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È un arbusto che può raggiungere 1,5-3,0 m di altezza.

Le foglie, decidue, lanceolate, di colore verde chiaro, lunghe 5-7 cm, emanano un intenso profumo di agrumi, simile a quello della *Melissa officinalis*.

I fiori piccoli, di colore bianco o lilla pallido, sono raggruppati in infiorescenze a spiga lassa.

## Distribuzione e habitat

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È originaria dell'America del sud: cresce allo stato selvatico in Perù, Cile e Argentina, da dove i *conquistadores* la introdussero in Europa nel secolo XVII.

## Tassonomia

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Aloysia citriodora fu descritta da Antonio Palau y Verdera e pubblicata nel Parte práctica de Botánica 1768 - 1784. Dalle foglie si estrae un olio essenziale, impiegato nell'industria cosmetica, ricco di composti volatili quali geraniolo, citrale e limonene. Foglie e fiori essiccati si possono usare per profumare armadi e ambienti.

In erboristeria si usa nella preparazione di tisane, infusi e impacchi. Si usa in cucina per fare liquori, marmellate, macedonie e come spezia. L'uso prolungato può però provocare disturbi allo stomaco, comprese le gastriti.

L'infusione viene usata come digestivo, carminativo e antispasmodico, in caso di dolori dello stomaco o indigestione. Si consuma anche come blando sedativo.

Ha una notevole quantità di melatonina, una sostanza usata come rilassante naturale che promuove il sonno notturno. Gli elementi utilizzati in infusione vengono raccolti due volte l'anno, in tarda primavera e inizio autunno. Vengono utilizzate foglie giovani e sommità fiorite.

Nel giardino di Villa Cipressi è presente a ridosso del muraglione vicino alla grande magnolia a lago.