

Catnip and Catmint

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Do you know the difference between catmint and catnip?

The common name “catmint” refers to a number of species in the *Nepeta* genus of herbaceous perennials in the mint family.

Catnip (*Nepeta cataria*) is a long-used medicinal herb that drives many cats a bit wild, while other species including *Nepeta mussinii*, *N. nervosa*, *N. grandiflora*, and *N. x faassenii* are attractive landscaping plants and are commonly known as catmint.

They have similarities. Common names are even used interchangeably which may be why there's attached confusion.

Common features between the two:

They are low maintenance perennials that grow in zones 3 to 9, and thrive in full to part sun.

Both attract pollinators and other beneficial insects-making them useful companion plants. Both are well suited for use in containers or garden borders. They have square stems that are typical features of mint plants.

CATNIP:

Nepeta cataria is a plant that's known for attracting cats. It contains a chemical compound called nepetalactone that causes characteristic euphoria in many felines. Other *Nepeta* species contain nepetalactone, but in much lower concentrations.

Catnip is commonly used in herbal medicine, and can be made into a soothing tea.

Nepeta cataria is a vigorous perennial plant with a somewhat weedy appearance. It will tolerate poor soil and reseed and spread readily. Plant it where you can keep it in bounds,. The leaves are a lighter green. Small spikes of white flowers appear but aren't very showy.

Cat behavior around catnip:

Research suggests that cats don't get addicted to these substances. They are more likely to become habituated and desensitized; the plants have less effect over time.

Veterinarians agree that cats are fine when given access to these treats. They certainly won't induce psychosis and won't lead to addiction or withdrawal symptoms. Not all cats are even drawn to catnip where others may roll around in the leaves in a stupor.

CATMINT:

Nepeta nervosa can be distinguished from catnip due to brighter green leaves and a mounding growth habit. It has a mature height of 1 ½ ft. and a similar spread, and has lavender blue flowers.

Nepeta x faassenii, or Faassen's catmint, is an award-winning hybrid with a compact mounding growth habit. It has small showy flowers and is grown primarily as an ornamental. The Faassen's catmint hybrid is sterile. That means it won't spread and take over the garden.

Nepeta 'Walker's Low' is a wonderful hybrid that has a long season of bloom and is easy to grow. Although "low" is part of its name, it is not a dwarf variety; it can reach 30 inches tall and wide. It is hardy in Zones 4–9 and I have successfully grown this one.

Catmint is one of those plants that thrives on neglect. Too much fertilizer can cause the plant to grow lots of lackluster foliage. Catmints start blooming in early summer with repeat blooms throughout the growing season. Deadheading produces stockier plants and a lush second bloom.

How to Propagate Catmint

Division is the best way to propagate catmint. Use a sharp shovel to cut a section of the plant with a good root system and replant it. You can also take cuttings in the spring.

Plant companions for Catmint:

The combination of roses and catmint is quite lovely. That duo looks beautiful and has the added benefit of hiding the rose's long stems while repelling detrimental insects. Catmint's bluish/lavender flowers combine beautifully with other perennials that enjoy the same growing conditions such as: Yarrow, Salvia, Southernwood, Mallow, Irises and Siberian spurge.

When I first started gardening, I didn't know differences between catnip and catmint. Now, I plant catmint in perennial borders for the color and plentiful bee and butterfly activity.

There's a patch of catnip in our side garden where it can spread without harm done. My partner dutifully dries a big batch for our 2 indoor cats every year. It's a small winter amusement to watch the resulting antics!

The Littleton Garden Club is an active group welcoming new members from around the area! Learn more about our club and our meetings at: <https://www.littletonnhgardenclub.org/>

Printed in the Littleton Courier Live Free and Dig Column on 2/12/25