

# Rosemary

## *Salvia rosmarinus*

Previously known as *Rosmarinus officinalis*



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On Anzac Day, sprigs of rosemary are worn on the lapel in remembrance of soldiers of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) who gave their lives at Gallipoli on the Turkish coast in 1915. This tradition has continued, with rosemary a symbol of remembrance for soldiers who served in all theatres of war. Rosemary is an apt tribute because it is a native of much of the Mediterranean coast and common along the Gallipoli Peninsula.

Until recently (2017) its scientific name was *Rosmarinus officinalis*, derived from two words, *Ros* – meaning dew and *marinus* – the sea, a reference to its ability to survive along the hot and dry Mediterranean coast where it derives much of its moisture from sea mists and dew. Rosemary is wiry and it's tough.



Unsurprisingly, the name change, from *Rosmarinus* to *Salvia* was based on DNA evidence. Molecular biologists found that Rosemary well and truly belonged in *Salvia*, and to maintain Rosemary with its current name, *Rosmarinus*, it would have meant that huge genus *Salvia* would have to be split into many smaller genera. It is reassuring that the old generic name, *Rosmarinus*, has been retained as the specific name, *Salvia rosmarinus*. By good



fortune, it could not be renamed as *Salvia officinalis* as that name had already been allocated to the herb we know as Sage.

The association of Rosemary with ‘remembrance’ goes back for centuries to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in which Ophelia famously says to Laertes: ‘There’s Rosemary, that’s for remembrance’.

Unlike most fragrant plants where scent comes from flowers, the aroma of Rosemary is derived from oil glands in leaves and stems, a characteristic of members of the plant family, Lamiaceae, to which Rosemary belongs. The complex aroma derives from a cocktail of powerful anti-oxidants and defence compounds, including phenolic diterpenes, flavonoids and phenolic acids. Other closely related species include Lavender, Basil, Thyme, Sage and Oregano, all edible and very flavoursome herbs. Where would the traditional roast leg of lamb be if it were not baked with sprigs of Rosemary? The family Lamiaceae is widespread worldwide and Australian Mint Bushes (*Prostanthera*) and Coast Rosemaries (*Westringia*) are also closely related.



*Salvia rosmarinus* – Rosemary

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Entwisle T, Talking Plants, 2021: [Rosemary is a Salvia, but still rosmarinus \(talkingplants.blogspot.com\)](https://talkingplants.blogspot.com)

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Wikipedia: [Rosemary - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosemary)

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