The scent of rosemary can boost your memory by 75%

Since ancient times, rosemary has been extolled as being both a memory enhancer and symbol of remembrance. Even in Shakespeare's Hamlet, Ophelia observes, "There's rosemary, that's for remembrance." It has also long been used as a symbol for remembrance at weddings, war commemorations and funerals in Europe and Australia. Mourners in old times would wear it as a buttonhole, burn it as incense or throw it into graves as a symbol of remembrance for the dead. It was even regularly referred to from the latter part of the Elizabethan Era to the Early Romantic period as the herb of remembrance.

Increasingly science is backing up what our ancestors already so sagely knew. In one of the most recent related trials, researchers from the University of Northumbria, UK, demonstrated that the smell of rosemary can boost your memory by up to 75%, "enhancing one's ability to remember events and to remember to complete tasks at particular times." To carry out the test, they enlisted a group of 66 people who were given memory tests in either a rosemary-scented room or another room without any scent at all. Various tests were applied to evaluate their memory functions. The results, presented at the British Psychological Society's annual conference in Harrogate last year, showed that participants in the rosemary-scented room significantly out-performed those in the unscented room.

"We wanted to build on our previous research that indicated rosemary aroma improved long-term memory and mental arithmetic," said author Dr Mark Moss. "In this study we focused on prospective memory, which involves the ability to remember events that will occur in the future and to remember to complete tasks at particular times. This is critical for everyday functioning. For example, when someone needs to remember to post a birthday card or to take medication at a particular time." The researchers are hopeful that their findings may help pave the way to treating people diagnosed with memory impairments.