



EDIBLE  
GARDENING  
SERIES

# Herbs

In the gardens of American pioneers, herbs were a major source of seasoning for foods, used for curing illness, storing with linens, strewing on floors, covering bad taste, dyeing homespun fabric and as fragrance.

Herbs are a very versatile group of plants. They can be used to make teas, perk up cooked foods such as meats, vegetables, sauces and soups. They add flavor to vinegars, butters, and dip. Many are grown for their fragrance used in potpourris, sachets and nosegays or scent bath water, candles, oils or perfumes.

Herbs also make interesting and beautiful landscape plants whether they are used formally in an herb garden, informally mixed into gardens with vegetables or added to a mixed border of annuals, perennials, shrubs and trees.

Herbs flowers and foliage provide a beautiful palette of color and variation in texture and form. Herbs add an element of excitement to landscaping that no other group of plants do - they evoke the senses of taste, smell and touch. Herbs are one of nature's little surprise packages that contain a lot of flavor. Herbs also attract honeybees and other beneficial insects. Some even help repel garden pests.

## EXPOSURE

Sun to part shade. They need at least 6 hours of sun a day

## PLANTING

Herbs can be grown in a designated bed, as part of a vegetable plot or in a perennial flower border. When planting herbs we recommend **Gardner & Bloome Soil Building Compost**, **Dr. Earth Starter Fertilizer** and **Bonide Root n Grow**. See our **Planting Guide** for more information. Herbs like well-drained soil. Cultivate your soil 12 to 18 inches deep and add compost and starter fertilizer.

Herbs do very well in containers. When planting your herbs in a container we recommend **Blue Ribbon Potting Soil**, **Osmocote Fertilizer** and **Bonide Root n Grow**. You can plant herbs singularly or create a beautiful mixed herb garden.

Why not create a themed herb container?

Salad Dressing Mix Container	Mexican Mix Container	Pizza Mix Container	Taco Container
Marjoram	Garlic	Oregano	Onions
Basil	Chives	Basil	Oregano
Thyme	Cilantro	Onions	Basil
Oregano	Tomatoes	Garlic	Garlic
Rosemary	Onions	Red Peppers	
	Jalapeno Pepper	Tomatoes	

## CLASSIFICATION

- Annual: produce foliage, flowers and seed in one growing season and then die. Examples: basil, cilantro
- Biennial: forms leaves the first season, flowers and seeds the second year and then dies
- Perennials: live more than 2 growing seasons

Herbs are often classified according to their use as culinary, medical, aromatic, ornamental or household/ industrial.

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## HARVESTING

Harvest depends on the herb, harvest may include one or more plant parts, most cases you harvest the leaves, other cases you pick flowers, seeds or roots.

Most herbs will have maximum oil content just before the flowers open, with a few exceptions this is a good time to harvest. Mints have the most oil in the leaves when flower spikes are in full flower.

General rule harvest the leaves when they contain the optimum amounts of essential oils. These oils give herbs their special flavor or scent. Harvest on a dry day that has been preceded by at least 2 sunny days, and the dew has dried from the leaves. Use an open weave basket or container to allow good air movement. Don't stuff herbs into plastic bags, which can cause rapid deterioration.

Cut back perennial herbs to about ½ its height and annual herbs to a few inches above ground. Or, if it is late in the season just pull your annual herbs out of the garden.

## PRESERVING

There are 3 ways of preserving your herbs

- Freezing
- Drying
- In a medium such as vinegar or salt  
*(Note: to prevent contamination and botulism, do not preserve herbs in oil)*

Things to consider when preserving your herbs:

1. Timing: see Harvesting section above
2. Amount: do not take more than 1/3 of the plant foliage at one time
3. Inspect: check foliage for insects and damaged leaves
4. Rinse: if necessary, rinse foliage in tepid water, pat dry with paper towel. Some herbs leaf will need to be stripped from stems, such as basil, dill, lemon balm, mint, sage, lemon verbena and tarragon. Herbs with smaller leaves can be dried on their stems such as thyme, summer and winter savory, rosemary, oregano, marjoram. Once they have dried, strip off leaves from their stems.
5. Drying:
  - Bundle 6 to 12 stems
  - Remove any foliage near the base of the stem
  - Secure with elastic band
  - Hang bundle away from sunlight in a cool location

Note: for individual leaves, place them on a screen or rack and turn frequently. Once they are dried, strip off leaves from their stems. Dehydrators can also be used to dry herbs. Using a cool oven (125°F) or a microwave oven are other means of drying herbs.

The herbs are dry when they are brittle and crisp. After cooling, store them in tightly closed, labeled jars away from heat and light, for up to one year.

## FREEZING

Chives, tarragon and many other herbs freeze well. For chives snip the stems into ¼-inch pieces place on cooking sheet place in freezer, leave for about 30 to 40 minutes, put in freezer and put back into the freezer.

## PRESERVING HERBS IN A MEDIUM

Preserving herbs in a liquid is another versatile way to package your herbs.

- Flavored vinegar: chop mint, tarragon or basil and place in vinegar
- Flavored salt: alternate shallow layers of fresh herbs in between layers of coarse salt. When thoroughly dry store flavored salt in an air tight container. Discard the brown desiccated herbs.

## GROWING HERBS INDOORS

Herbs grow very nicely indoors. They are just less productive than herbs grown outdoors. Things to consider when growing herbs select a south or west window.

- During the winter herbs need as much light as you can give them.
- Never leave herbs sitting in a saucer of water. When potting herbs for indoor use we recommend using **Blue Ribbon Potting Soil** and **Osmocote Fertilizer**.

## SELECTION OF WHICH HERBS TO GROW

Herbs are easy to grow and delightful to use. When selecting which herbs to grow the ones to choose will depend on the type of cooking you do and the flowers you like. Some basic and easy to grow herbs include thyme, garlic, oregano, basil, dill and chives.

Lavender, peppermint and chamomile make delicious and soothing teas. When growing herbs for tea, choose the herbal teas that you like or want to drink. Also consider medicinal benefits of various herbs when making your selection. For example:

- Chamomile for calming nerves and inducing sleep
- Echinacea for boosting the immune system
- Mint for calming upset stomachs and aiding in digestion

## MAKING HERBAL TEAS

Herbal teas are great hot or cold. They can be soothing, stimulating, mild or spicy. Make several blends to match your mood and taste. (Remember, you can mix spices, citrus peel. And, even add dried fruit with your herbs.

### Hot Herbal Tea

For each cup of tea, measure 2 tablespoons of fresh herbs or 1 tablespoon of dry herbs onto a non-metallic tea pot or mug. Pour boiling water over the herbs. Allow to steep for five minutes. Strain before serving. Sweeten to taste.

### Herbal Iced Sun Tea

Fill a gallon -size glass jar with cold water. Add 1 to 2 cups of fresh herb leaves and flowers (rinse them first if they are gritty), then place the jar in a sunny spot for 4 to 8 hours. Strain before serving. Pour onto glasses over ice. Sweeten to taste. Herbs are used whole or in part.

- Minty teas: anise hyssop, catnip and mints
- Fruit flavored: bee balm, chamomile, lemon balm (these herbs also blend well with minty flavors)
- Licorice flavored teas: angelica, anise, fennel
- Savory herbs: marjoram, rosemary, sage

## FLAVORED VINEGAR

Herb vinegars capture the full flavor of fresh herbs and preserve that flavor in a vinegar solution. Use herb vinegars for extra flavorful soups, sauces, marinades, and dressings. Combine some sprigs of fresh herbs or sprinkling of dried herbs with vinegar to give it a gourmet flavor.

Let the herbs steep in the vinegar for a couple of weeks until the vinegar takes on their fragrance, then strain the herbs out, or you can leave herbs floating in the bottled vinegars if you think they are pretty Place in glass jars, seal with non metal tops, and store in a cool, dark place.

### Herbal Vinegar

Warm your vinegar in a stainless steel, enamel or microwave safe ceramic container. Avoid metals other than stainless steel, which could react with the vinegar and give it a bad appearance and taste.

Pour the warmed vinegar over the herbs, which will break down the leaves and extract oil from the herbs more quickly than cool vinegar. Let the vinegar sit for two or four weeks in a covered bottle. Sample the vinegar and see if it is flavorful enough yet. If so, strain it into sterilized jars, cap air tight and store until you are ready to use it. If not, add some more herbs and let them soak for a week more.

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### Some Good Combinations for Herbal Vinegars

- Borage, dill, shallots and white wine vinegar
- Cilantro, garlic and rice vinegar
- Fennel leaf, garlic, parsley and white wine vinegar
- Sage, parsley, shallots and red wine vinegar
- Chili peppers, garlic, oregano and apple cider vinegar
- Dill, nasturtiums, garlic and apple cider vinegar
- Rose petals, violet petals and rice vinegar
- Savory, chive blossoms and apple cider vinegar

**Note: Dark opal basil (purple foliage) will create purple tinted vinegar**

### FRESH AND DRIED HERB MEASUREMENTS

When substituting dried herbs for fresh ones in a recipe, use this equivalence guide:

1 tablespoon of fresh herbs equals ½ teaspoon of dried, crumbled herbs or ¼ teaspoons of dried, powdered herbs

#### Bay Laurel

Pull individual leaflets from the sides of stems. The leaflets have a strong flavor. The scent is not present until their leaflets are heated, when oils are released.

#### Garlic Chives

Flat rather than hollow stems. Garlic chives grow to be about 12 inches tall; flower stalks grow up to 30 inches high, topped with greenish white or pink flowers. Garlic chives add a subtle garlic flavor in uncooked dishes. A great replacement for garlic salts and powdered garlic.

#### Lavender

Flowers and leaves can be used fresh. Buds and stems can be used dried. Best used with fennel, oregano, rosemary, thyme, sage, savory. Lavender has a sweet, floral flavor with lemon and citrus notes.

#### Oregano

A warm aromatic scent and robust taste. Used in flavoring fish, meat and sauce. Goes well with vegetable, roast beef, lamb, chicken and pork also in stuffing, dumplings, scones and breads.

#### Rosemary

Blends well with garlic and thyme to season lamb roasts, meat stews and marinades. Enlivens fish, poultry dishes, tomato sauces and vegetables.

#### Sage

Musty yet smoky aroma. Enhances pork, lamb, meats and sausages. Great flavor to add salads, pickles, cheese, seafood's and vegetables.

#### Thyme

Use in soups, sauces, with meat, poultry or fish, stuffing, fish sauces, chowders and soups.

### EDIBLE FLOWERS

When using edible flowers be sure to identify the flower exactly and eat only the edible flower and edible parts of those flowers. Use flowers sparingly in your recipes due to the digestive complications that can occur with a large consumption rate. Most herb flowers have a taste that's similar to the leaf, but spicier. The concept of using edible flowers in cooking is not new. For further information, visit: [whatscookingamerica.net/EdibleFlowers/EdibleFlowersmain.htm](http://whatscookingamerica.net/EdibleFlowers/EdibleFlowersmain.htm)

#### Daylily

Slightly sweet with mild vegetable flavor: like sweet lettuce or melon. Cut petals away from bitter white base. Great in salads and decorating cakes.

#### Dianthus

Can be steeped in wines, candy or use as a cake decoration. The petals are sweet. Cut away from base of flowers add color to salads.

#### English Daisy

Flowers have a mildly bitter taste. Petals are used as a garnish in salads.

#### Garlic Chives

Wonderful in salads adding a garlicky zing.

#### Lavender

Add the lavender flowers to a glass of champagne, garnish ice creams, or sorbets. Also good when added to stews, custards and flans.

#### Lilac

The flavor varies from plant to plant. They have a slightly bitter with a distinct lemony taste with floral overtones. Great in salads, or crystallized with egg whites and sugar.

#### Oregano

A milder version of plant's leaf.

#### Pansy

Slightly sweet green grassy flavor. Use as a garnish, in fruit salads and dressings.

#### Rosemary

Milder version of the rosemary leaf. Great in flavoring meats, seafood's, sorbets and dressing.

#### Sage

Sage flowers have a milder sage taste, great to use in salads, as a garnish, or in bean and corn dishes. Also good in dressings, and pesto sauces.

#### Sweet Woodruff

Flowers have a sweet and grassy flavor with a hint of nutty, vanilla flavor.

#### Thyme

Milder flavor than the leaf. Use as garnish.

#### Tulip

Tulip petals are edible tasting like sweet lettuce or fresh baby peas or a cucumber.

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