

PLANT LAND

GREENHOUSES • NURSERY • GARDEN CENTER

Growing Herbs

Comparing freshly harvested herbs to the dried supermarket selections will convince any gardener to make a space for herbs in the garden or on the patio. Herb gardens are perhaps one of the more romanticized forms of gardening but in reality they can be relatively simple and provide abundant fresh herbs for cooking. Herbs are considered different from spices. Herbs are generally categorized as having soft stems whereas spices most often come from woody plants. Cinnamon, which comes from the bark of a tree, is an example of a spice. There are some exceptions though, such as Bay Laurel, a herb that comes from a small tree.



Herbs are very ornamental and can be grown in perennial borders along with flowers. They work very well in pots and window boxes too. A number make good houseplants and can come in to the kitchen windowsill in winter. A number of herbs are perennials, that is, they will return year after year if planted in the garden. Thyme and sage are both perennial herbs. Herbs like basil and cilantro are grown strictly as annuals because they are too tender to withstand winter. A chart for annuals versus perennials is on the back of this sheet.

Both herb seeds and plants are available at Plant Land. Most herbs grow readily from seed but a handful of herbs are hard to grow from seed. Tarragon and lemon verbena are thought of as difficult. In addition, hybridized herbs may not grow true from seed or may show great variation. Plants such as lavender and rosemary are usually propagated by cuttings for this reason although you can try them from seed too.



Herb gardens simply need two things: good hot sun for at least 4-6 hours per day and soil that drains well. Raised beds work extremely well. Since the majority of herbs are grown for their leaves, soil that is rich in nitrogen is important. Work compost into your herb garden every year. It may be necessary to add some sand to many garden soils to improve drainage when you first plant your herb garden.

Fertilize your perennial herbs with compost in spring and again in mid summer. Fertilize annual herbs with water soluble fertilizers such as 20-20-20. Herbs that must produce flowers for seed should receive additional phosphorus (0-18-0) to promote flowering. Scratch about 1/2 cup in around the base of each plant in early summer. Always use non-toxic solutions to control pests or diseases on your herbs. Be sure to rinse herbs well before using to remove any residues of fertilizers or insecticides. Luckily herbs are bothered by very few insects or diseases.

Just like any garden plant, herbs need good watering through the growing season. Although many are native to dry climates, they still appreciate some supplemental water during the hot days of summer. This is especially true of large leafed herbs like Basil. Herbs can be allowed to dry out between waterings and then should be watered deeply.



Harvest leafy herbs such as parsley, chives or tarragon often. Doing so will keep the plant producing more leaves. If you cannot use the leaves immediately, dry or freeze them for later use. Herbs like dill produce both leaves that are used for seasoning and seeds that when dried are used for cooking. It is important to let a herb like dill flower and go to seed in order to collect the tasty seeds. A chart on the reverse of this sheet lists harvest methods.

If you want to dry herbs for later use, start by cutting whole stems and tying them into bundles. Hang the bundles in a warm, dry and dark spot for several weeks until dry. Strip and crumple the leaves from the stems and store them in airtight containers. You can freeze herbs by simply placing whole leaves (no stems) into freezer bags. Some herbs freeze better than others. Basil, for example, simply turns black if you freeze it. Sage on the other hand, freezes very well.

Do not cut woody herbs such as Thyme down in fall. Cut soft stem perennials such as Chive as you would any other perennial, down to about 2". Fall will provide abundant harvest of many herbs. If you pot some up to bring inside, be sure to use potting mix not garden soil. Herbs in pots must have good drainage. Large plants can be divided into smaller plants to fit better in a pot. Herbs that make good houseplants are noted on the reverse of this sheet under growing seasons.

Growing Seasons for Common Herbs

Annual
Basil

Biennial
Parsley

Tender Perennial
Fennel

Hardy Perennial
Catnip

Bay*
 Borage
 Chamomile German
 Chervil
 Coriander
 Dill (reseeds readily)
 Lemon Verbena
 Rosemary*
 Savory
 Scented Geraniums*

Lavender*

Chamomile Roman
 Chives*
 Horseradish
 Lemon Balm
 Marjoram
 Mint*
 Oregano*
 Sage*
 Tarragon*
 Thyme*

* - good houseplant for fresh herbs in winter

Harvest Methods

Harvest Leaves

Anise
 Basil
 Chervil
 Chives
 Cilantro
 Dill
 Fennel
 Lemon Balm
 Marjoram
 Mint
 Oregano
 Rosemary
 Sage
 Savory
 Tarragon
 Thyme

Harvest Flowers

Anise
 Basil
 Bee Balm
 Borage
 Chamomile
 Chives
 Dill
 Lavender
 Mint
 Nasturtium

Harvest Seeds

Anise
 Caraway
 Celery
 Coriander
 Cumin
 Dill
 Fennel
 Mustard

Harvest Roots

Caraway
 Fennel
 Ginger
 Horseradish

How Many Plants Will I Need?

Herb plant yields vary by plants. Light yield means you would want to consider at least a half dozen or more plants. Heavy yield means that one plant would more than likely be enough. Amounts are for a family of four.

Light Yields

Anise (seed & flowers)
 Caraway (seeds)
 Chamomile (flowers)
 Coriander (seeds)
 Cumin (seeds)
 Dill (seeds)
 Fennel (root)
 Mustard (seeds)
 Saffron Crocus (stamens)

Medium Yields

Basil (foliage)
 Bay (foliage)
 Dill (foliage)
 Fennel (foliage)
 Lavender (foliage)
 Marjoram (foliage)
 Rosemary (foliage)
 Sage (foliage)
 Tarragon (foliage)
 Thyme (foliage)

Heavy Yields

Catnip (foliage)
 Chives (foliage)
 Lemon Balm (foliage)
 Mint (foliage)
 Oregano (foliage)
 Parsley (foliage)

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