

Growing Culinary Herbs

Discover How to Grow Your Own Fresh Herbs and
Use them to Create Delightful and Delicious Dishes

By Nicolette Goff

[Through Nana's Garden Gate](#)

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Reviews of [How to Preserve and Enjoy Your Garden Herbs](#) (Kindle Edition)

“Great Tips” Linda L. Strother (Asheville, NC)

Every year I grow herbs because I love fresh herbs in my food but I really did not know how to dry and preserve herbs. I found this book packed with great useful information. I had no idea that I could freeze herbs in ice cube trays, brilliant idea. Next growing season I will be armed with a game plan.

“Very Precise and To the Point” AngelicMom "Angel" (Portage, IN USA)

This is a quick read but it is to the point-there are some nice tips. She explains what herbs work well with what oils, vinegars, etc. Excellent book for the topic of preserving your fresh herbs. I look forward to reading more from her.

“Great Advice, Quick and Simple” Hannah E.

I'm trying a new, organic-type diet and I wanted to grow a lot of my own herbs and spices, but I didn't really know where to start. I stumbled upon this book and it was a great help, quick and to the point. I learned what I needed to know in no time, and I'm already planning my garden for this year. I'm excited because a lot of the recipes ... called for a lot of the herbs I was growing, so now I can use them from home and not have to go the store.

My sincere thanks to all who read my first herb book, “[How to Preserve and Enjoy Your Garden Herbs](#)”, and took the time to write a review. I'm pleased that I could add value, and I appreciate you!

Can I ask a quick favor?

After you finish reading this e-book, I'd be grateful if you wrote a REVIEW on Amazon.

Your feedback is much appreciated and will help me improve the next edition.

Nicolette

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INTRODUCTION:

Botanically, we define an herb as “***a plant whose stem does not produce woody, persistent tissue and generally dies back at the end of each growing season.***”

However, many of us think of herbs as edible plants used to flavor foods, and some of the herbs we grow in our kitchen gardens definitely do not fit that botanical definition.

It is not a very helpful definition, since it includes many plants we wouldn't think of as herbs, and leaves out a lot that are favorites in the kitchen.

However, one dictionary definition is much closer to how we view herbs:

“Any of various often aromatic plants used especially in medicine or as seasoning.”

Although herbs have a long history as medicinals, I have not included that information in this book.

This book is intended to be a guide to herbs for both the gardener and the cook – how to grow them and how to use them in the kitchen. It includes a detailed planting, growing and harvesting guide to 21 of the most common culinary herbs.

It is also a guide for the chef in your kitchen. You will find a wealth of ideas for using the herbs you grow. Learn which herbs marry well with which vegetables and how to prepare tasty herbal butters, sauces and dressings.

The short recipe section will, I hope, inspire you to experiment on your own with the herbs you grow. From herb teas to savory sauces, your garden herbs make cooking - and eating - a taste adventure.

Let's begin with a short history of these fascinating plants...

A SHORT HISTORY OF HERBS

The history of herbs is almost as old as the history of man.

From earliest times, we humans have used plants for a wide range of purposes – to fight disease, for their beauty, to enhance the flavor of foods, to make soothing or invigorating teas, and for their delicious aromas.

Paleontologists discovered that the ancient Egyptians used herbs even before the pharaohs ordered the building of the pyramids.

You need look no further than the Bible to see how herbs were not only grown and used, but actually were tokens of currency. Read through the gospels of Matthew and Luke. You'll find references to tithes paid in herbs like mint, cumin, and other herbs that were deemed valuable.

Ancient Chinese, Egyptians and Greeks all recorded how herbs were used, both medicinally and to flavor foods. Many of these early herbal remedies became the standard treatments herbalists and 'doctors' used for hundreds of years. These useful plants, both culinary and medicinal, spread throughout Europe with the expanding Roman Empire.

But different cultures used herbs in many other ways. Sybarite Greeks slept on beds of fresh rose petals. Other herbs were strewn on floors, releasing their scents as people trod on them. They masked the odors from poor sanitation that pervaded homes and streets.

Scented smoke from herbs burnt on ceremonial altars drifted through the air. The aromatic herbal steam from public bathhouses wafted through the air, where mint and thyme scented the waters and were rubbed on the skin of bathers.

Flowers such as roses, chamomile, bergamot and violets were eaten, brewed as teas, added to wine, and enjoyed in every possible way. Herbs still familiar today flavored foods and wines, and acres of certain herbs were grown to attract bees and produce honey.

Herbs even appeared in Greek mythology, with special ones dedicated to different gods.

The Romans enjoyed herbs as well. Their baths were made fragrant with lavender and roses, and rich Romans stuffed their mattresses with these fragrant and sleep-inducing herbs.

Roman cooks flavored their foods with mint sauces, saffron, garlic and various other native Mediterranean herbs, many still in use today. Rose petals and clove carnations garnished dishes and added flavor to wine. As the Roman Empire expanded, these herbs traveled with the cooks and colonizers throughout the empire.

After Rome fell, and barbarous tribes effectively wiped out Roman culture in many parts of Europe, gardens and orchards fell into decay. Some of the plants vanished, while others managed to naturalize and survive.

As these tribes, especially the Anglo-Saxons, traveled and settled, they acquired a taste for the local foods. They became great herb-fanciers, with cultivation and use of over 500 plants, both for culinary and medicinal use.

In kitchens and monasteries, monks and cooks distilled liqueurs and digestive drinks flavored with herbs. Examples are wormwood in vermouth and absinthe, balm, hyssop and angelica in Chartreuse, and saffron, mint and fennel in strega. Distillers closely guard their secret recipes even today.

Returning Crusaders brought other herbs and plants to England and the Continent, along with a taste for more exotic flavors. These new plants flavored food, freshened clothing, deterred insects and even were held up to the nose to mask the unsanitary smells of the streets. Pilgrimage parties acquired a taste for foreign foods and medicinal knowledge; and the uses of herbs, both culinary and medicinal, spread.

Herb gardens graced many homes in Tudor England. The plants were important for 'doctoring' and to improve the taste of foods. Cooks began to use a variety of herbs in different ways. Lovage, celery, parsley, dill, mint, and thyme were some of the earliest culinary additions to the cook's herb garden.

Cooks devised elaborate sauces with herbs, garnished food with them, and spiced up stuffings for meats and poultry. They used herbs in flavored puddings, sweetmeats and jellies. Many of the sauces devised over the last 5 centuries are still used by chefs today.

Throughout the ages, herbs continued to be grown in the 'physic gardens' in monasteries.



Monks and nuns recorded their ancient medicinal and culinary uses in manuscripts. Homemakers and local 'wise women' created simple recipes for cures and health-giving tonics.

Sometimes the remedies worked, but just as often, they did not. Since it was difficult to control growing conditions, harvesting and other variables, the effects from remedies made with the same plant could vary dramatically.

However, as science and scientific methods improved, the active ingredients in many herbs were identified, purified and standardized. Many drugs today have their origin in plant compounds, and plants like foxglove, belladonna and lobelia are still the source for some modern treatments.

In recent years, people everywhere have become much more adventurous with foods, and the appreciative use of both spices and herbs has increased. Supermarkets offer a wide range of dried herbs, and even some fresh ones. Greenhouses and nurseries supply herb seeds and starter plants for the home gardener.

Herbs provide health benefits in our diet, since they contain vitamins and essential minerals. Many herbs aid digestion, as well as adding flavor. Others make refreshing or soothing teas.

Culinary herbs contain volatile or 'essential' oils, which give them their distinctive aroma and flavor. Just crush the leaves of the thyme, rosemary or mint plant, and you free the oils to smell their aroma. Use fresh herbs immediately, before the oils disperse.

Home gardeners are realizing the beauty of herb plants, along with the added pleasure of using the freshly picked plants in their cooking and teas. Herbs are

satisfying plants to grow – not just for their uses.

Many have attractive foliage and flowers. Others have wonderful scents that disperse as you brush by. And knowing you're growing plants that have been cultivated and used for centuries is another of their fascinations.

Today, few gardeners grow medicinal herbs for their own use. Culinary herbs, however, are increasingly grown and used. Some gardeners grow only those they commonly use and are familiar with, such as mint and parsley. Others choose to plant less familiar herbs, and create an herb garden that inspires them to take their cooking to the next level.

Whichever type and size of herb garden you decide on, you're on your way to an interesting, fragrant and mind-expanding journey.

PLANNING YOUR HERB GARDEN:

Your herb garden can be anything you would like to make it – from an intricate Elizabethan knot garden to a plot of free-flowing plants. You can grow a few favorite herbs in pots on your patio or balcony, mixed throughout your ornamental borders, or as a part of your vegetable garden.



So, the first question to think about is – where?

The location must be the best for the area, climate and type of conditions you have to work with. However, as a general rule, the closer to the house (or kitchen) your herbs are located, the more you will use them.

Choose a sheltered position, since many herbs are native to warm climates and protection from cold winds is important. Their subtle fragrance will also linger longer away from breezes. Choose an area with plenty of sunshine and good air circulation.

How much space can you allot to your herbs?

A formal herb garden is beautiful, but can take up a lot of space and will need careful planning and a lot of maintenance. However, you will be frustrated with a too-small space, since you will run out of space for all those new herbs you read about, and want to add to your garden.

Unless a warm and sheltered location is readily available for your herbs, it's a good idea to give your herbs some protection – a hedge, fence or trellis on the windward or north side. Choose hedging carefully – you don't want to plant anything (like privet) that will drain the soil of minerals.

Although a fence or trellis may not offer the best protection right away, it can

support climbing plants that will fill in the openings and also add some vertical interest.

The plant-growing zone you live in must also be considered. What zone are you in?

You can find out by going to <http://www.almanac.com/content/plant-hardiness-zones>.

Herbs -- and culinary herbs especially -- can make themselves at home just about any place in your existing flower garden. Even if you don't have a flower garden now, you can find some place in your yard for an herb here and an herb there. That's just part of the beauty and ease of growing herbs.

When deciding where exactly your specific herbs will live, you really don't have to worry about breaking any hard and fast gardener's rules. It would be sensible to separate those herbs that like dry soil -- like rosemary and thyme -- from those that need more moisture -- like basil and parsley.

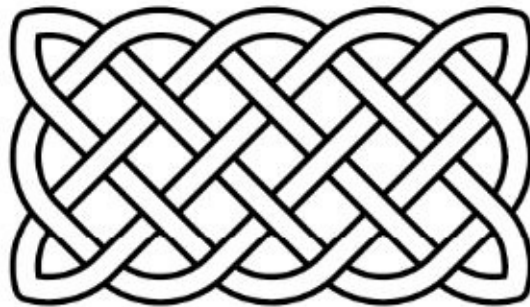
Plant the herbs that you use most frequently as close to your kitchen door as possible. As much as we're aiming for beauty in the garden, the ultimate goal of a culinary herb garden is to enhance your cooking. If the garden isn't functional, then it's just not successful, no matter how beautiful it is.

So -- let's look at some different ways to design your garden and plant your herbs.

FORMAL HERB GARDENS

The ultimate formal herb garden is the knot garden. Elaborate knot gardens first became popular in Europe in the 15 Century.

Planted with aromatic herbs, the inner areas were separated by meandering pathways so people could enjoy the beauty and aromas of the garden. Early Elizabethan knot gardens were patterned after beautiful Celtic knot designs like this one.



A knot garden consists of a geometric design, usually within in a square or rectangular frame. Separate areas are bordered with pavers or low hedges that form the pattern, and the sections filled with selected herbs.

Each can hold a variety of aromatic plants and culinary herbs such as marjoram, thyme, lemon balm, costmary, chamomile, rosemary, calendulas, chives, germander and santolina.

Many knot gardens have an outer border planted with box (*Buxus sempervirens*), which can be pruned to form a clean, crisp look. The paths in between sections consist of fine gravel or pavers. Sometimes, a central accent, such as a statue or fountain is included.



Grow a different herb in each section, choosing plants of certain colors, certain

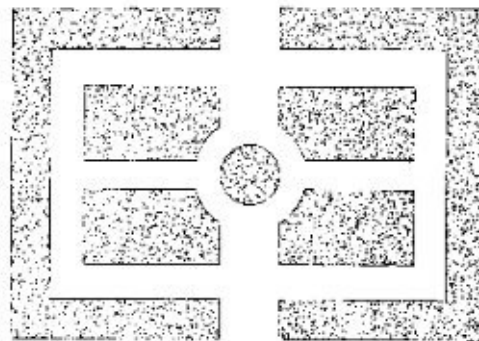
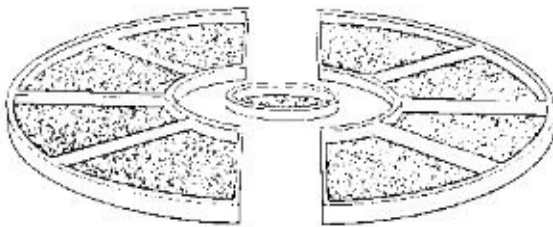
aromas, or for different cooking styles. One section could be annual herbs, for example, while a second one could hold small perennials like thyme or winter savory.

Careful planning is necessary if you decide to plant a formal knot garden for your herbs. Take precise measurements, and draw out a scaled plan with great care. Have fun playing with designs on graph paper and design your own original pattern.

Some possible patterns for a modern knot garden include checkerboard, brick diamond, square within square, diagonal paths within a square, interlocking diamonds, diamonds in rectangles, and circular wheel beds.

Many garden and herb growing books contain patterns for simple knot gardens - circular, square or rectangular beds, at least 6 feet long and wide. Ribbons of low herbal hedges or pavers of contrasting colors form the symmetrical designs.

Here are two possible designs:



INFORMAL HERB GARDENS

Most of us will choose to avoid the planning, expense and hard work of planting a formal knot garden, and simply plant herbs in either their own garden space or right inside an existing vegetable or ornamental garden. With an informal garden, it's even more critical to know your plants – how large they will grow, what soil, moisture and sunlight they require.

Put the taller plants at the back, or if you are planting an island bed, put them in the center. Obviously, you will locate the shortest herbs at the front. It is also important to know other characteristics of your chosen plants so you can create the most pleasing plantings.

Consider these important factors when choosing what and where to plant:

- ☺ Does it sprawl or grow compactly?
- ☺ How tall does it grow?
- ☺ Does it drop seeds indiscriminately?
- ☺ Will it spread rapidly through its root system?
- ☺ When does it flower?
- ☺ Does it have interesting seed heads for winter interest?
- ☺ Is it evergreen?
- ☺ Will it need pruning?
- ☺ What color is the foliage?
- ☺ Does the foliage have interesting textures?
- ☺ What color are the flowers?
- ☺ What season is it at its best?
- ☺ What soil, moisture and light conditions does it require?

Consider all these points as you plan your garden, and you will have an interesting and attractive herb garden.

Complement tall architectural and bold plants like angelica, lovage or fennel with softer, more feathery foliage of plants like caraway or even lavender. You can also group plants according to their use – medicinal, culinary, cosmetic, attractiveness to bees and so on.

You can even separate them more by creating, for example, a culinary garden just for your favorite Italian herbs or French herbs. Alternatively, if you're an herbal tea lover, plant a bed of containing herbs that make great teas.

Herbs with colorful, dark, or variegated foliage make a great accent in flowering borders. Many of these, such as the sages, have leafy varieties of all three types. There is no reason not to include beautiful herbs among your ornamental border plants and shrubs.

Some, like rosemary, lavender, bay and thyme, already are widely used as decorative or ornamental plants, as well as for their culinary and aromatic properties. Others like parsley, chives or pot marigolds make lovely edgings to your ornamental borders.

One reminder: If you plan to use any herbs in your kitchen, in either cooking or in teas, go as organic as possible. Never use chemical sprays on plants that you will consume.

HERBS FOR OTHER LOCATIONS

PAVINGS AND WALLS

Because many herbs are native to areas with poor or dry soils, they are naturals for planting in the spaces and gaps in paving stones or in rockeries. Low spreading plants grow best in these places, and commonly used ones are prostrate rosemary and thyme. Both will drape themselves attractively over walls. Low growing thyme will fill spaces between pavers.

Leave gaps as you lay pavers or build a brick or stone wall to create space for plants. Start with small plants, or ones you have raised from cuttings. Set them in place with a bed of good soil while they are still young to ensure the root system will fit into the area without damage or crowding.

RAISED BEDS

Another convenient way to grow herbs is to plant them in raised beds.

Locate raised beds where the soil is poor – such as heavy clays, shallow rocky soils, or areas with poor drainage. The raised bed will provide good soil conditions and drainage that many herbs love. They are also at a better height for harvesting, saving you a lot of bending.

Invasive herbs are great candidates for individual smaller raised beds. With their own confined area, they won't rampantly spread all over your gardens. Tansy, comfrey, horseradish, lemon balm, catnip, artemisia, all kinds of mint, and some other herbs spread aggressively via underground runners unless you control them. The best way, if you decide to plant these herbs, is to restrain them in their own restricted area.

HEDGES

Plant and then clip some of the larger evergreen herbs to form garden hedges or screens. Dig and prepare the soil deeply before you do any hedge planting, since these are permanent arrangements. Add garden compost and bonemeal for long-lasting growth.

Choose young, well-shaped plants for hedges, and prune them back by about a third when you plant them. This will ensure that you have full, bushy growth at the bottom of the hedge. Keep the side shoots clipped, and trim the plants back after flowering.

Rosemary, lavender and box are good herb choices for a lower formal hedge, while some thymes, marjoram, winter savory and dwarf lavenders shape well for a less formal edging miniature hedge.

CONTAINERS

Really don't want to deal with a lot of digging? Perhaps your backyard isn't quite big enough. You want to enjoy your own freshly picked herbs, but live in a downtown apartment or a town home with a pocket-sized yard.

We have the solution... start growing your herbs in pots. Why not confine your culinary herb garden to just one or two "whiskey" half-barrels or a few containers?

Two of these half-barrels hold enough herbs to easily supply a family of two or three with the essentials. In addition, what a tremendously attractive addition to your yard or deck those containers would be!

You can easily grow all your herbs in containers. Many herbs adapt very well to containers. Large patio containers such as those half-barrels, large glazed earthenware pots, tubs and urns will hold either one larger plant or a selection of smaller herbs that have similar growing conditions.

So the soil in your containers drains well (herbs hate soggy soil, and will die on you), put a couple of inches of gravel in the bottom of the pot before you add the soil. Top with a sterilized potting soil mixed with some perlite to keep it light.

As far as knowing when your herbs need watering, it is simple. Just poke your finger about an inch into the soil. If it is dry, water the plant. But... never over-water. If you check them frequently, you will soon know just how often they need watering. Occasionally, you may want to add a little liquid fertilizer to the water (something natural, like a seaweed extract), but most herbs need little feeding.

One very useful and space saving pot is the strawberry pot. These pots come in different sizes, with several planting holes in the sides, so you have a 'vertical garden'. They are a good choice not only for strawberries, but also for trailing

herbs like thyme.



Choose smaller herbs for your strawberry pot, such as chervil, parsley, thyme, and marjoram and smaller basil. Before you fill the strawberry pot with soil, insert down the center a section of 2-inch plastic pipe with quarter inch holes drilled in it every 2 inches. This makes watering simple, so all your plants will get enough moisture.

One advantage you have if you are growing herbs in pots is the freedom to move them around, indoors or outdoors. Plant herbs in small pots, right on the kitchen windowsill or a sunny counter area where they are handy for cooking.

After you have potted up the seedlings, place them on a plastic or metal tray, and put a shallow bed of gravel in it. Place your plants on the gravel and add water to the tray. Your plants will now have their own instant humidifier. A weekly misting with clean water will make them even happier.

You can keep your herbs indoors all year, but most of them will definitely do better in an outdoor location. Give them a summer outside, and bring them inside in fall.

In colder areas, where more temperature-sensitive perennials like rosemary and bay would freeze, grow them in containers. Simply wrap them well in the fall, or in cold locations, bring them into a greenhouse, sunroom or a warmer room for the season.

Planting these larger perennials in containers will also keep them from growing to full size.

INDOOR HERB GARDENING

A few herbs adapt well to growing indoors. This is one way of having a supply of fresh herbs successfully in the winter months. Plants that are grown indoors require as much natural light as possible and regular watering and feeding.

Set indoor herbs on a kitchen windowsill or plant table that is south or west facing, and receives 6 hours of sunlight daily. Herbs planted in containers and kept indoors will not last forever, and will need to be replaced every couple of months.

Parsley, chives and basil are three herbs that grow well indoors. Keep the herbs in small pots individually and group the pots together on a tray filled with gravel or in a container with a layer of gravel. Add water to the tray to create a localized humidity. The gravel raises them out of moisture, and you avoid waterlogging the plants.

If you don't have the perfect herb-friendly conditions available, hydroponics may be the way to go. This is a soilless setup using liquid nourishment and special lights to grow plants fast. Because herbs are among the most popular garden plants for this type of arrangement, it's easy to find hydroponic equipment specifically for indoor herb gardens.

One of the easiest and most reliable is the [Aerogarden](#), small enough to fit on a kitchen counter. About the size of a breadbox, this will grow fresh herbs for you 365 days a year. Another method is to use grow lights, and the [Hydrofarm](#), a full spectrum grow light assembly is one device to grow herbs indoors. It doubles as a seed and plant starter to give your garden herbs or vegetables a head start.

CULINARY HERBS FOR SPECIFIC CONDITIONS

As gardeners, first we have to take into consideration our own growing conditions. We can amend these to a certain extent with some hard work. However, sometimes we have to work with what nature has given us, or what we have already developed in our yard.

By choosing plants that will grow well and thrive in the specific conditions we have to work with, we are much more likely to have a thriving herb garden. The following lists will help in your selection of what to grow.

✧ Are you looking for herbs to plant in an area of poor soil – dry and rocky?

Then make an herb rock garden. Here is a selection of herbs that are naturals for these conditions: calendula, curry plant, lavender, marjoram, oregano, rosemary, sage, winter savory, and various thyme varieties.

✧ You have lots of space in your vegetable garden, where you have built up a base of rich soil.

The following culinary herbs will thrive here: basil, borage, chives, cilantro, dill, fennel, lovage, parsley, summer savory, tarragon and lemon thyme.

✧ No vegetable garden, but room to plant some herbs in your flower gardens?

Then these are attractive choices for an ornamental bed with average soil: basil, bee balm, calendula, German chamomile, chives, curry plant, fennel, lavender, lovage, marjoram, bush rosemary, sage, and various thymes.

✧ Your available space has little direct sun.

These herbs will grow well in partial shade: borage, calendula, chervil, chives, cilantro, dill, fennel, lemon balm, lovage, all mints, and parsley.

✧ You would like to cover the soil, so weeds don't grow.

If you're looking for culinary herbs that can double as ground covers, then choose from among these: Roman chamomile, lavender, hardy marjoram, mint, oregano, winter savory and thymes.

✧ Which herbs make attractive edgings?

Here are a few good candidates: chives, curry plant, lavender, marjoram, bush

rosemary, winter savory and lemon thyme.

☺ You would like to grow your own herbs, but have no yard or garden space.

These herbs grow well in containers: basil, bay, calendula, chives, lemon grass, marjoram, mints, oregano, parsley, rosemary, winter savory, tarragon, thyme, and lemon verbena.

DECIDING WHAT TO GROW

When you are deciding what culinary herbs to grow, it's a good idea to check your spice rack. Which herbs do you use the most?

Is it that jar of Italian seasoning? Then you should choose oregano, marjoram, thyme, rosemary and basil.

Maybe it is the caraway and anise seed jars that empty fast, because you love the flavor in baking.

Perhaps you're always short of some of the leafy green herbs, like parsley, cilantro, chives, dill and basil. Then those too should be part of your own culinary herb garden.

That's why I've developed a **“Top 21 List of Culinary Herbs.”**

These are not only some of the most commonly used herbs in cooking; they represent some of the easiest ones to grow. Some are annuals, others perennial. Many add beautiful foliage and colorful flowers to your flower gardens and yard, as well as inspiration for your kitchen.

I have included information about essential growing conditions, plant appearance and size, and even suggestions for using the herbs in your kitchen. Photos of each are included.

Although this is not a comprehensive herb list, with this list in hand on your first trip to the nursery, you're bound to have success in finding what not only works in your yard but choices that will mesh well with your taste buds.

PLANT BY PLANT GUIDE TO THE TOP 21 CULINARY HERBS

ANGELICA (ANGELICA ARCHANGELICA)

Best climate and site: Zones 4 to 9, partial shade

Angelica is a tall sweet scented herb that closely resembles its smaller relatives of parsley and coriander. It is a hardy biennial growing up to 8 feet tall. The plant has stout hollow stems with broad lobed leaves.

Large round umbels of fragrant yellow-green flowers appear in the second year in mid-summer. If you remove the flower heads, angelica will live for several years. The plant dies after blooming.



Since it transplants poorly, sow seeds outdoor in late summer, in a semi-shady and damp area where the plants will grow. Dig the soil deeply and add compost for quick tender growth. Thin the young plants to 3 feet apart. These young seedlings will transplant as long as care is taken not to break off the long roots.

The entire plant has a pleasant aromatic fragrance and flavor and all parts are used. Both seeds and roots are ingredients in the liqueur chartreuse. The roots are often used in perfumery as a substitute for musk. The seeds help flavor both vermouth and gin, and the dried leaves are used in preparing bitters.

Eat the tender leaf ribs either raw or cooked, like celery. The candied stems are widely used as decoration on cakes and other sweets. Collect fresh young leaves in June and dry them for tea. Angelica retains its flavor well when dried but loses much of its flavor if it is frozen. A few leaves of Angelica can replace up to half of the sugar when cooking fruits like rhubarb.

BASIL (OCIMUM BASILICUM)

Best climate and site: Zones 4 – 10, full sun

Many cultivars of basil exist, and basil is grown in most parts of the world. It is widely used as a culinary herb, and in making perfumes and scented oils for ceremonial use. The most common culinary basil is known as sweet basil. Some other culinary varieties are anise basil, opal basil, lemon basil and purple ruffles basil.



Basil is probably the best known Italian herb, and is an ingredient in many Italian recipes. It not only adds flavor to cooking; it is a useful companion in the garden to other plants. Plant basil next to peppers and tomatoes, and they will grow better, with better flavor. Basil, incidentally, will also repel flies and mosquitoes!

Basil is the best herb for pesto, hands down. Its leaves have a uniquely complex scent and flavor: you can detect cinnamon and cloves a little the courage and even a bit of citrus. You need to add just a small amount of this delightful herb in such dishes as soups, salads and sauces.

Basil is also decidedly suited to season any dish that includes tomatoes and tomato sauces. Don't hesitate to use basil to enhance the flavor of your meat, poultry or fish. You can even add it to your morning breakfast omelet. Chop the fresh leaves and add them to vegetable salads. Layer them with mild cheese and tomatoes.

Start your basil from seed outdoors after all danger of frost has passed, or sow indoors in flats or seeding trays six weeks before the last frost. Sow more than you think you'll need, as the seedlings often damp off. You'll likely want at least

6 plants to keep you well supplied in the kitchen.

Transplant the seedlings outdoors only when all danger of frost has passed and nighttime temperatures are above 10°C (50°F). In cold weather the plants may go into shock and growth will be retarded. As the plants grow, pinch back the growing tips continuously so the plants bush out and create more foliage.

Growing basil is fairly easy, but the plant needs full sun, moisture and good organic soil. Drainage is important, but do not allow the soil to dry out. Set out basil in a warm sheltered corner of your garden, or in pots. Because it is a tender plant, basil is generally grown as an annual, although it can be a perennial in tropical areas.

Water basil well in dry, hot weather and it will grow rapidly. Prune away the flowers to get the best foliage flavor. The harvested leaves can either be used fresh or preserved. Separate the leaves from the stems and freezing them in freezer bags. Alternatively, make pesto and freeze any extra in ice cube trays.

In cooking, use basil sparingly, as it has a strong flavor. It goes well with all tomato dishes, egg dishes, vegetable soups and white or butter sauces. Add fresh basil to sauces at the last minute, as longer exposure to heat lessens the flavor.

BAY (LAURUS NOBILIS)

Best climate and site: Zones 8 to 9, sun to partial shade

Bay laurel or sweet bay is an evergreen perennial shrub, and in its native Mediterranean region, can grow up to 60 feet. It is aromatic, with green, glossy leaves and pale yellow-green flowers. Gardeners generally grow bay in a container, where its size can be controlled. Move it into a warm area for wintering.



Lending itself to container growing, bay makes an attractive pot plant for a patio. Bay requires well drained soil, and thrives in full sun or part shade. It can be trained and pruned into attractive pyramidal or spherical shapes. Trim your bay to shape in summer, removing any suckers from the main standard.

Bay leaves are one of the traditional ingredients in bouquet garni. Most cooks use dried leaves that they purchase but these have lost much of their vitality and taste. The fresh leaves taste rather bitter when they're first picked but within a few days become sweeter. Pick the leaves in summer, and dry them for use all year long.

They can be added to an enormous number of dishes, adding flavor to marinades casseroles stews, soups, and slow cooked dishes. Many pickle recipes call for bay leaves. The leaves hold their flavor for a long time while cooking so add them at the beginning and always remove them before serving, as they are not edible.

CHERVIL (*ANTHRISCUS CEREFOLIUM*)

Best climate and site: Zones 3 to 7, partial shade

Chervil is a small plant with delicately cut leaves and white flowers. It is desirable in the kitchen for its subtle flavor: a mixture of anise and parsley. With its dainty appearance, the leaves similar to parsley or feathery carrot tops, it is a valuable addition to a decorative herb garden. The leaves grow close to the ground, and the small flowers rise above on long stems.



Chervil grows best in the cool temperatures of spring and fall. Plant chervil seeds in a partially shady area that is moist, with rich garden soil. For a continuous harvest, plant it at two-week intervals until mid-summer. Four adult plants provide a good supply of the fresh leaves.

As the plants grow, remove the flower heads to encourage foliage growth. Once chervil is established in the garden and allowed to flower, it will self-seed. In mild climates, chervil will grow for more than one year, and the leaves can often be harvested all winter long.

The delicate taste complements many dishes and is often added to salads, soups and white sauces. It brings out the flavor of other herbs. Add chervil to your raw vegetable salads, omelettes and other egg dishes. Make chervil butter for use on broiled fish and poultry, potatoes, and other cooked vegetables.

Chervil is one of the essential ingredients of the French fine herbes combination. It does lose its flavor quickly when heated so is best used fresh or added right at the end of cooking. Chervil can be dried, but will lose some of its flavor. It retains flavor well when frozen.

CHIVES (*ALLIUM SCHOENOPRASUM*)

Best climate and site: Zones 3 to 9, full sun

Chives consist of a dense cluster of tiny bulbs. The hollow grass-like leaves grow 12 to 18 inches tall. Globular flowers appear in May and June. The leaves, bulbs and the flowers of this hardy perennial are edible, and many cooks consider chives to be an essential culinary herb. Chives are one of the ingredients in French “fines herbes”.



A culinary favorite since early days, chives have been popular in China, Europe, North America, the Mediterranean and the Far East for centuries. Originally valued as a medicinal, chives are now mostly valued for the mild and delicate onion flavor they add to dishes.

Grow chives as an edging to an herb or ornamental bed. Their grass like tubular stems and pink or purple pom-pom flowers make an attractive addition to a flower bed. Once the plants have set flowers, the leaves will toughen and growth of the plant will slow. Cut them down to about 2 inches after flowering and you'll soon see new green growth.

In the culinary garden, start with 4 to 6 chive plants, and increase the number through division of the clumps. Dig up the plants every 2 to 3 years and divide them into smaller clumps of about 9 to 12 bulbs.

Chives require rich soil and frequent watering. They do well in containers or in the garden and are very hardy. Chives can survive quite well in the house during the winter. Since they lose flavor with drying and freezing, pot up one or two of your plants in the fall into 5 inch pots. Keep them well watered, with good drainage, on a sunny windowsill, for fresh use.

Chives have a mildly onion taste. This makes them an excellent addition to salads, any egg and cheese dish, cream cheese, sandwich spreads and sauces. Use them to flavor salad dressings, grain salads, frittatas and potatoes.

And, oh, by the way, don't restrict chives to just the baked potato. Taste how it adds a little zing to your mashed potatoes and potato salads as well. Sprinkle them on soups, blend them into butter for an herbed butter spread, or add them to sandwiches. Use chives in any dish that could be improved by a mild onion flavor.

CORIANDER (CORIANDRUM SATIVUM)

Best climate and site: Zones 2 to 9, sun to partial shade

Coriander is a hardy annual that has become much more popular in recent years. It has light green leaves, similar in appearance to Italian parsley. The leaves, when used in cooking, are commonly called cilantro.



The plants grow 20 to 30 inches high and are leggy and not particularly attractive. The white flowers, arranged in rounded tassels like dill, are followed by ridged spheres of pale brown seed fruits. These seeds are dried and ground as the coriander spice, or used whole.

Cilantro leaves are used in a wide range of dishes and as a garnish. They have a strong distinctive flavor that not everyone likes. Sometimes called Chinese parsley, the leaves, are added to salads soups and stews. They are used frequently in Indian, Chinese and Central and South American cooking.

Coriander seeds, either ground or whole, are used in curries, pickles, breads and liqueurs. The seeds have a sweet and spicy aroma and flavor, pleasantly unlike the leaves.

When using cilantro or coriander leaves, pinch off the upper leaves so that little stalk is left. Then pinch off the pairs of leaves that grow further down the stalks. Discard the tough stems, and wash the leaves and dry them before using. The leaves can be chopped and frozen with water in ice cube trays.

Plant cilantro seeds either in spring or autumn in a semi-shaded and well drained position. The plants enjoy rich soil so dig in some garden compost before seeding. Depending on your interest and use, you'll decide how much to plant.

A second planting in early fall provides cilantro leaves well into fall. Keep the plants close together for thicker foliage. Harvest leaves from the young plants, or if you've planted a lot, take the entire plant. They will keep well if placed in a jar

of water and kept in a cool place.

Once hot weather arrives, the plants tend to run to seed quickly, and unless the seeds are gathered, the plant will self-seed.

DILL (*ANETHUM GRAVEOLENS*)

Best climate and site: Zones 2 – 9, sun

Dill is a graceful upright annual herb growing about 24 to 36 inches tall. Its appearance is similar to fennel, with feathery blue-green leaves and small open umbels of yellow green flowers. The flowers are followed by brownish seeds which are very strongly aromatic.

Unless collected, these will drop to the ground and the plant will self-seed. For this reason gardeners sometimes think of dill as a weed.



Dill grows best in rich and slightly acid soil and in an open and sunny area. Sow the seeds shallowly in spring or early summer and thin the seedlings to about 9 inches apart. Likely half a dozen plants will be enough for your use.

Avoid planting dill near fennel as the plants will cross pollinate. Keep it watered so that the growth is not slowed down. Start picking the feathery leaves when the plants are 4 inches high. By pinching out at this stage, the plants will bush and create foliage, but not flowers or set seeds.

Allow some plants to grow without pinching back, for the flowers and seeds. Harvest some of flower heads just when the flowers are beginning to open, and allow others to remain so the seeds ripen. The flowers and seed heads as well as the leaves are used as a flavoring in pickles. Make dill vinegar by soaking dill seeds in vinegar for a week.

Both leaves and seeds are used in the kitchen. Chopped sprigs of dill leaves are widely used as a flavoring in Scandinavian dishes. The flavor marries well with eggs, cheese, seafood, fish and potatoes.

Preserve the leaves by freezing them, whole or chopped; or dry them. Use dried dill generously, as much of the flavor is lost. Store the dried foliage and seeds in

airtight containers.

FENNEL (FOENICULUM VULGARE)

Best climate and site: Zones 6 to 9, sun

This large perennial herb comes in two forms: green fennel and bronze fennel. The more common green fennel has fresh green finely divided and delicate leaves. Bronze fennel is very similar but the leaves are a pale brownish green in color. In mid-summer small yellow flowers in umbrella shaped clusters form. The foliage of both fennels is very decorative and can be a great addition to the back of an ornamental border.

Fennel is a large plant that can grow up to 8 feet tall. It requires fertile soil and frequent watering. This perennial grows well in a sunny place. It can be grown from seed, and once established it is very hardy.

One or two plants are sufficient unless you use it frequently. Harvest the young leaves as you need them. Unless you collect the ripened seed, fennel, like dill, will self-seed everywhere.

The fronds are most tender in spring. Unless fennel is cut back, it will grow to head height and the stems will become coarse. By cutting the stems to the ground once during the growing season, plenty of new growth will be formed.

Fennel seeds are used in baking and are said to aid digestion. The leaves are both decorative and flavorful, and can be used in soups, fish dishes, egg dishes and potato salads.



Gardeners can grow second variety of fennel, Florence fennel (*Foeniculum dulce*). It is grown either as a biennial or an annual. The leaves and stalks are similar to common fennel, but this variety forms a fist sized bulb at soil level. Florence fennel is grown for this sweet anise flavored bulb, which can be used in salads or soup or baked with cheese.

Grow Florence fennel from seed as an annual. Plant the seeds in late spring in full sun in rich moist soil. Thin the seedlings to 8 inches apart, and keep them moist. The bulb will begin forming in September. The bulbs are ready to harvest in early October or November.

Use a knife to slice the bulb from the root when it has grown to 5cm (2") or more across. If you are careful, smaller bulbs will sprout from the root later. As the weather cools and frost is formed make sure any bulbs still not harvested are covered with 6 inches of soil or sawdust to protect them and extend the harvest.

GARLIC (*ALLIUM SATIVUM*)

Best climate and site: Zones 5 to 10, sun to partial shade

Garlic is one of the most familiar culinary herbs, adding a pungent flavor to dishes from almost every ethnic group in the world. A member of the onion family, we often don't think of garlic as an herb, but it is essential in flavoring many dishes.

The garlic bulb is made up of a number of smaller cloves or bulblets, and covered with a whitish papery skin. Less common pink and red skinned varieties are available. The leaves are long, narrow and flat unlike the tubular leaves of onions and chives. White globe headed flowers rise directly from the center of the bulb on tough stalks.



Plant the cloves or bulblets separately either in the fall or in February or March. Set them at a depth of 2 inches, 6 inches apart. For best growing conditions, enrich the soil with additional organic matter. Keep the plants weeded and pull the soil up around the bulbs occasionally.

Lift the garlic bulbs from the ground in August or early September, after the leaves have yellowed and died down. Lay them in the sun on screens to dry for a day. The long dry stems can be braided and hung in bunches in a cool dry place for winter use.

Historically garlic has been used as a medicine, said to relieve many common complaints and infections. Because of its strong sulfurous odor and pungent flavor, it seems garlic is either hated or loved.

Fresh garlic is a special treat, much milder than older cloves. Use garlic minced in sauces, pressed with olive oil and lemon juice for dressings or added to vegetables while cooking. It is an essential ingredient on bruschetta and in pesto.

LEMON BALM (*MELISSA OFFICINALIS*)

Best climate and site: Zones 4 to 9, sun to partial shade

Lemon balm is a hardy perennial with dark green egg shaped leaves. It can grow 3 to 4 feet high and has a strong lemon flavor and scent. The blossoms, which appear at the leaf axils, are white or yellowish white. You can plant lemon balm anywhere but if it is planted in a shady area ensure that the soil is drier and well drained.



Pinch back the growing tips of lemon balm to increase the foliage and to prevent the plant from seeding. In October cut the stems back close to the ground. Like its relative, mint, lemon balm can spread quickly in rich moist earth.

One plant will meet most gardeners' needs, but because the blossoms attract bees you may want more. You can easily propagate lemon balm either by seed, by cuttings or by plant division in spring or fall.

Harvest lemon balm as needed for fresh leaves, and for drying when the flowers open. The flavor is retained well in drying. Take just a few inches of top growth the first year. In the second year the plant can be cut right down two or three times throughout the summer.

Lemon balm is used in herb mixtures to supply a gentle lemony flavor. Use it fresh or dried with fish and poultry and veal. It is an ideal tea herb, with a mild citrusy flavor that blends well with many other tea herbs. It can also be used fresh in green salads and light summer dishes.

The lemony-scented fresh leaves rubbed on your skin will discourage mosquitoes from biting.

LOVAGE (*LEVISTICUM OFFICINALE*)

Best climate and site: Zones 5 to 8, sun

Another tall and attractive perennial herb to grow in zones 5 to 8 is lovage. Large dark green leaves on hollow stalks grow up to 6 feet. They resemble oversized celery. The plants bloom in mid-summer, with tiny greenish-yellow flowers in umbels on a tall stem. Lovage has thick fleshy roots. The entire plant is edible, and has a pungent and celery-like flavor.



Plant lovage in rich moist soil, preferably in part shade. The plant can be propagated by seed, sowed in September. Sow the seeds thickly, as germination can be poor. Thin the seedlings so that the plants are 2 to 3 feet apart. The seedlings will usually transplant well. Plant divisions can also be taken from the outside of an established plant.

Even if you don't use lovage often, it is a beautiful and useful enough plant to locate at the back of a flower bed. The blossoms attract the tiny parasitic wasps that prey on garden pests such as tent caterpillars, cutworms and budworms.

Once the plants are established, harvest the fresh leaves for use in soups, stews and with fish dishes. They can also be blanched and frozen, or dried for winter use. The leaves taste of celery and parsley, with a certain spiciness. The taste does not decrease with cooking, so use it sparingly until you're used to it. The dried seeds can replace celery seed, once harvested.

Chop up fresh young leaves, and use in stir fried vegetables, with potatoes, and in sauces. Replace celery in chicken, egg or salmon salads with lovage. And use a hollow lovage stem as a flavorful straw with your bloody Mary!

MARJORAM (ORIGANUM MAJORANA)

Best climate and site: Zones 9 to 10, sun

Marjoram looks very similar to oregano, but has a sweeter more delicate flavor. The leaves are aromatic and the flowers taste slightly sweet. The bushy plants are smaller than oregano with small gray green leaves.

Marjoram, often referred to as sweet marjoram, is generally grown as an annual although it is half hardy perennial. Germination by seed is slow, so your best choice is to purchase plants from a nursery. Marjoram grows well in rich and sandy soil and prefers a sunny and dry position.



Marjoram is a tender plant, ideal for outdoor planting in zones 8 – 10. Mature plants can be potted up in the fall and taken into a greenhouse or cold frame to be overwintered if you live in a colder area.

French marjoram or pot marjoram is a native of southern Europe and is the best kind to grow for culinary use. It is more aromatic and has a stronger and more delicious flavor and other types. It grows into a foot high bush, with lush bright green leaves and purplish pink flower heads.

Marjoram is a favorite in Italian, Greek and Mexican cuisine. It is excellent in all meat dishes. It blends well with the flavors of parsley and thyme. Use it in poultry seasonings, vegetable soups, and juices. Infuse the flowers to make an herbal tea, or preserve them to flavor vinegar and butter. Dried marjoram is deliciously aromatic and can be used in closets to perfume your linens.

MINT (MENTHA SPP.)

Best climate and site: Zones 5 to 9, sun to partial shade

Mints are probably the most well-known and widely grown of all the herbs. There are more than 20 species and dozens of cultivars and hybrids have been developed. Mints hybridize quite freely but there are some with culinary value. Spearmint, peppermint, and apple mint are the three most commonly grown. Most mints are perennials, with felt-like leaves and spikes of flowers in late summer.



Spearmint has coarse pointed green leaves on slightly hairy stems that are heavily serrated and pale purple flowers. It grows well in a semi-shady and moist spot, and needs to be contained. It can spread rapidly by its invasive root runners. Peppermint has narrower finer leaves and pale purple flowers, smooth stems and is just as invasive. Apple mint has rounded serrated pale green leaves and hairy stems. It will grow to 2 feet and is not quite as invasive as spearmint and peppermint.

Each of these mints has a particular use in the kitchen spearmint is the one commonly used for flavoring lamb dishes as a mint jelly or mint vinegar. It goes well with vegetables such as potatoes carrots peas and beans. It also makes a great mint tea. Peppermint is most commonly used in desserts and also as a tea. Milder Apple mint makes an excellent tea.

Because there are so many varieties, when choosing the mints to grow in your garden, sample them and choose ones whose taste appeals to you. Start with stem or root cuttings or buy plants in a nursery.

Always plant mints where the roots can be confined. Take an extra precaution when you first plant them if you're placing them in the garden bed itself. Sink a

plastic bucket with no bottom into the ground around each plant. That keeps them contained for a specific depth.

Large containers like half barrels or larger black plastic plant pots make great containers for mint. Mint requires lots of organic material in the soil and the soil should be kept moist. Most mints thrive on neglect once they're established.

Harvest sprigs from your mints, and hang them to dry in bunches. Separate the dried leaves from the stems and store them in an airtight container. Dried leaves can be used in seasoning, as tea, or to make mint sauces and jellies. Both dried and frozen leaves have an excellent retention of flavor.

Fresh leaves can also be used to make a mint sauce. Simply strip a good-sized handful of mint leaves from the stems and chop them finely. In a mortar and pestle, pound the chopped leaves with a small amount of sugar. Stir in 2 tablespoons of boiling water and 2 tablespoons of white vinegar. Allow the mixture to stand for 30 minutes before serving.

OREGANO (ORIGANUM VULGARE)

Best climate and site: Zones 5 to 9, sun

Oregano is a warm, aromatic herb used widely in Italian, Greek, and Latin American cooking. It's closely related to marjoram, but it lacks marjoram's sweetness and has a stronger, more pungent flavor. It's readily available both fresh and dried. Fresh oregano has a milder, more delicate flavor, but both forms pair extremely well with tomato-based dishes, like pasta and pizza.



It has deep green leaves that are small and slightly fuzzy, and purple flowers on stiff fuzzy stems in late summer. Greek oregano is similar and is distinguished by white flowers and a much stronger flavor. The plants grow 18 to 24 inches high, and prefer full sun, and can be slightly invasive in the garden.

Oregano can be propagated in a variety of ways. Old plants are easily divided in early spring. Cuttings can be taken in the summer and rooted. It is also a good plant for layering since the lower stems will root easily when pinned to the soil. Once established, the plants are easy to care for.

Greek oregano maintains its flavor very well on drying. Cut long stems just before blossoming since this is when herbs are most flavorful. Tie them into bundles. Hang them in a darkened area to dry, and when the leaves are thoroughly dry, separate the leaves from the stems. Store the dried leaves in an airtight container for use all winter long.

After flowering, cut it back and a second growth will keep you supplied with fresh oregano until a hard frost.

Both dried and fresh oregano are essential in Mediterranean dishes. The flavor marries well with tomatoes and is an ingredient in tomato sauces, soups, and pasta dishes. The fresh leaves can be finely chopped and added to cheeses or salads. Use dried oregano in salad dressings or to make flavored oil.

PARSLEY (*PETROSELINUM CRISPUM*)

Best climate and site: Zones 5 to 9, sun to partial shade

No herb garden or kitchen would be complete without parsley. It is probably the most widely used culinary herb. Parsley is one of the ingredients in “fine herbes” along with chives, tarragon and chervil, and is also included in “bouquet garni”. Parsley can be added to salads, sauces, salad dressings, stuffings, butters, and many meat fish and vegetable dishes.



Did you know that by eating fresh, raw parsley after a meal, you have a natural and effective breath freshener? Originally, sprigs of parsley were served on a small dish after the meal. Today, parsley is often placed as a garnish on a variety of meals. Make sure you eat it!

There are two very familiar varieties of parsley: flat leaved and curly parsley. Plain or flat leaved, parsley, called Italian parsley, has a strong and distinctive flavor and flat dark green leaves. Curly leaved parsley which is more common, is a vigorous plant used for both flavoring and garnishing. Both parsley types are hardy biennials, but often treated as annuals.

Start parsley from seed early in the spring as soon as you can work your soil. Alternatively, purchase nursery plants to set out in the garden after frost danger has passed. Plants should be set 6 to 8 inches apart, in rich well dug soil. If you use a lot of parsley, you will need at least six plants in your garden or in pots. They tolerate either full sun or partial shade.

Harvest your leaves as needed for fresh use, by cutting the stems close to the ground. New leaves continuously will form at the plants crown throughout the summer. Parsley can be dried although it loses some flavor. A better preservation

method is to chop it and freeze it in ice cube trays. Remove the cubes when frozen and store them in small plastic bags in the freezer.

Parsley is probably the world's most used herb. It is a storehouse of nutrients, and if you only use it as a garnish, you're missing out. Here are a few ideas for using it:

- ✧ Combine chopped parsley with bulgur wheat, chopped green onions (scallions), mint leaves, lemon juice and olive oil to make the Middle Eastern classic dish, tabouli.
- ✧ Add parsley to pesto sauce to add more texture to its green color.
- ✧ Combine chopped parsley, garlic and lemon zest, and use it as a rub for chicken, lamb and beef.
- ✧ Use parsley in soups and tomato sauces.
- ✧ Serve a colorful salad of Florence fennel, orange sections, cherry tomatoes, pumpkin seeds and parsley leaves.
- ✧ Chopped parsley can be sprinkled on a host of different dishes, including salads, sauteed or roasted vegetables and grilled fish.

ROSEMARY (ROSMARINUS OFFICINALIS)

Best climate and site: Zones 8 to 10, sun to partial shade

Rosemary is an evergreen shrub that grows in two different manners. The upright form can grow to over 6 feet in height if it's unclipped. When it is clipped will it becomes bushy with dense foliage. There is also a prostrate variety which grows to about 12 inches high and has a drooping and trailing habit.



Mature plants are drought resistant, but hardy outdoors only in zones 8 to 10. In colder areas they are best grown as potted plants that can be brought into a sunny greenhouse for the winter or an enclosed porch, since they will rarely survive prolonged freezing temperatures.

The evergreen leaves of this tender shrubby plant are needle like, about an inch long and dark green on top and grayish beneath. The misty blue flowers appear in April and May, and attract beneficial bees to the garden.

Rosemary is highly fragrant with piney, slightly gingery aromatic scent and flavor. It is an excellent ornamental in the flower garden, and can be pruned into a fragrant hedge. The delicious fragrance is released whenever you brush by. If you are pruning the plants for shape, keep the clippings and either dry them or freeze them for later use.

Rosemary thrives in full sun in sandy well-drained and limey soils. When planting, add some dolomite lime to the soil or plant it next to a concrete walk. Cut back the new growth in the fall and suspend watering to allow the plant to

toughen up before winter. To propagate rosemary, take cuttings from new growth in the fall or layer stems during the summer.

For kitchen use, one rosemary plant is adequate. Although you can grow it from seed, is easily available in nurseries as a potted plant. The soft new growth can be cut at any time to be used in the kitchen.

Rosemary is widely used for flavoring meat dishes and in marinades, barbecue sauces and in baking. The chopped leaves can be added to breads and biscuits, adding an interesting flavor and aromatic scent. Put sprigs of rosemary under the skin of a chicken or turkey before roasting it, and add a leaf or two when frying potatoes, or cooking tomatoes and zucchini.

Sprigs of rosemary can also be used to flavor vinegars and oils. Rosemary can also be used for its scent in a potpourri and makes an interesting and refreshing addition to hair rinses and baths. The essential oil is used in cosmetics and some pharmaceutical preparations including treatment for headaches.

SAGE (*SALVIA OFFICINALIS*)

Best climate and site: Zones 4 to 8, sun to partial shade

Sage is an easy to grow shrubby perennial with aromatic foliage, originally native to Mediterranean countries. It is a hardy evergreen perennial with the grayish- green felt like leaves and spikes of blue to mauve flowers. Several forms of Sage are available including purple sage, red sage, yellow variegated sage and tricolor sage.



Sage is also an excellent ornamental plant for either the herb garden or flower beds and borders. With careful pruning, sage can become an excellent bushy border plant. The evergreen leaves add interest all year round, while the late spring flowers in colorful spikes attract bees and other beneficial insects.

Sage grows best in sunny areas but will tolerate some shade. Plant it in well limed sandy soil that has good drainage – it will not tolerate damp conditions. To propagate sage, take cuttings or divide the older plants in either spring or fall. Sage will grow easily for several years and then it begins to decline. Renew the plants every four or five years.

Sage has a strong warm bitter and slightly astringent flavor. The new shoots contain the most flavor, so do not let sage plants get too woody. It works well in stuffings for pork, poultry and sausages. Dried sage is good mixed with cream cheese or added to biscuits and bread dough before baking. Dried or fresh leaves are used for tea.

Snip off fresh leaves as needed, or cut a stem and hang it to dry (or use a dehydrator) for use during the winter months. When drying sage leaves take care to dry them thoroughly or they may become moldy. Sage can also be frozen and

either method will retain the flavor very well.

SUMMER SAVORY (*Satureia hortensis*) & WINTER SAVORY (*Satureja montana*)

Best climate and site: Zones 6 to 9, sun

Summer and winter savory are two aromatic and easy to grow Mediterranean herbs that should be in everyone's garden. Both have echoes of thyme and oregano, with just a hint of spiciness.

Traditionally these two plants were grown near bee hives, providing nectar for honey production. They also are great companion plants, because their aromatic essential oils help mask the scent of other plants, making it difficult for pests to locate their targets.

Summer and winter savory are very different in life cycle and appearance, so are usually grown separately.

Summer savory, an annual herb, grows best in rich soil, full of humus and with good drainage, so is often grown along with vegetables in the garden. It can fit in at the ends of your rows of vegetables, where it will grow into a bushy plant about 18 inches tall.



With its lanky stems and narrow leaves, it is not one of the most beautiful herbs. However, its texture will complement larger leafed annual herbs like basil. If you have a separate annual herb bed, plant it there, alongside basil, marjoram and parsley. Throughout the summer, harvest this herb as you need it, taking off the growing tips to encourage growth.

On the other hand, winter savory is a hardy perennial herb, surviving in areas with temperatures down to -20F. It appreciates a less fertile but well drained soil, and can handle a moderate drought. With needle-like foliage that covers the stems, it will grow into a thick mound about 12 inches tall.

This neat bushy growth habit it makes a good edging plant. It can be planted with other perennial herbs like thyme and sage, or with your low growing perennials like dianthus and thrift. It even works well in rock gardens.

Start summer savory from seeds, indoors in early April. Don't cover the seeds, since they need light to germinate. The seeds germinate quickly and the seedlings can be hardened off and planted outside when the weather is reliably frost-free.

Winter savory is slow to germinate from seed, so you may be better to buy a healthy nursery plant or two. They can be placed in the garden in either spring or early fall. Once it is growing in the garden, winter savory is easy to propagate from cuttings or layering. As it ages and becomes woody, it will need dividing.



Neither savory needs much maintenance if you have provided the proper growing conditions. They are seldom bothered by insect pests or diseases. Summer savory will love a watering with fish emulsion to kick start regrowth after harvesting, but winter savory will thrive quite nicely all summer with just a little compost top dressing each spring.

Both savories are easy to harvest and preserve. Harvest summer savory throughout the summer and fall, and if you are going to preserve it for winter use, do so just before the plant flowers. Winter savory can be sheared any time, and the trimmings used right away or dried. Both savories are easy to dry, either in a dehydrator or by air drying. You can also remove the leaves from the stems and freeze them in bags.

One other preservation method is to make a savory pesto by pureeing the leaves in a food processor with olive or safflower oil. Freeze the paste in ice cube trays, and pop the frozen cubes into freezer bags. You can then drop them into soups, stews or sauces.

TARRAGON (*ARTEMISIA DRACUNCULUS*)

Best climate and site: Zones 4 to 8, sun to partial shade

Tarragon, or rather French tarragon, is one of the main components of the “fine herbes” combination, along with chives, chervil, and parsley. It is a half-hardy perennial that will need winter protection. The narrow leaves are considered a necessity in most cook’s gardens. They have an intense licorice flavor, tart and spicy, making it a useful herb for flavoring.



Sometimes difficult to grow, tarragon needs light well-drained soil. It should be in a warm and sheltered spot, and can tolerate some shade. The plants grow to about 2 feet in height, with the narrow glossy leaves arranged on fine stems.

Tarragon does not seed, even though it will blossom. Purchase only the true French tarragon bedding plants from a reputable source. Two or three will be enough for most gardens, planted about a foot apart. You can propagate more by dividing the roots in spring, or by taking and rooting heel cuttings. In the fall, cut the plants back and cover the plants to protect them from damp and excessive cold.

Tarragon leaves are harvested as needed, and if you plan on drying them, do so before the plants flower. Both drying and freezing methods of preserving this herb will retain good flavor. Steep the leaves in vinegar to flavor it, and use the tarragon vinegar for salad dressings.

Much used in French cuisine, tarragon has many uses, but add it with care until

you're accustomed to the strong flavor. Place a small bunch inside a chicken or turkey when roasting it. Make herb butter with the leaves for flavoring meats and vegetables. Chop the leaves and add them to egg dishes, breads or savory sauces.

This is another herb is perfect to season lamb. If lamb isn't your meat of choice you can still enjoy the flavorful benefits of tarragon with fish, steak and even vegetables.

THYME (THYMUS VULGARIS)

Best climate and site: Zones 5 to 9, sun to partial shade

Thyme is a favorite of both gardeners and chefs. It grows easily and there are many varieties - at least one to suit every taste or location. Thyme is a hardy perennial that loves full sun but can tolerate partial shade. Ideally you will plant it in sandy well-drained soil that is slightly alkaline. This plant will thrive even in stony poor soils.



All thyme plants have small aromatic leaves. In summer little white, pink or purple flowers cover the plants and attract bees and butterflies. This small evergreen shrub matures into a 12 inch high plant that is spreading. The lower branches tend to root and the plant slowly grows outward. Its low creeping habit makes it a good plant for rockeries or as a groundcover.

The intensity of flavor in culinary thyme plants varies widely, with the broader leaved varieties having the strongest flavor. **Lemon thyme** is a small bush with lemon scented leaves that are especially good with fish or chicken. **Caraway thyme** has a slightly resinous caraway flavor, and adds flavor to roast beef.

Common thyme is used in a similar manner, adding flavor to stew, in seafood chowders, in chicken and onion soups. It is one of the essential ingredients of “herbs de Provence” and “bouquet garni”. A sprig of thyme, one of rosemary and one of mint, brew a refreshing tea.

To harvest thyme, snip the fresh foliage as needed during the summer. Once it

flowers, trim the entire plant lightly to keep it bushy. It can be harvested entirely twice per season, as long as you leave least 3 inches of growth.

Bunch together the branches and hang them to dry. When dry, strip the leaves from the stems and store them in an airtight container. Thyme leaves also freeze well in airtight containers or freezer bags.

HERBS IN THE KITCHEN

COOKING WITH FRESH HERBS

I've often heard people say, "Well, I grow herbs but I really don't know how to use them. Parsley is great, and I make a bit of pesto, but I don't really use many of them. I'm just not sure which herbs go with what."

If you want to know how to use culinary herbs, then the first step is growing them. A fragrant and lush herb plant just outside the kitchen door is the best incentive and inspiration.

Using your fresh and home-grown herbs regularly in cooking has two distinct advantages.

First, of course, they add a unique and flavorful dimension to your cooking that not only will impress you, your family and dinner guests. By using these herbs regularly, you'll also keep your plants well-shaped and healthy.

If you're not quite sure what herbs go with what foods, wing it! That's right! Just experiment. Experiment with different herbs in various dishes, and you may hit upon a combination that's perfect for you.

A word of advice here: start small.

Fresh herbs have a much stronger flavor than those dried bottled herbs you buy in the store. Besides, it's much easier, once you've taste-tested, to add more of a specific herb to a dish.

Most of us aren't all that adventurous in the kitchen. We tend to stick to our standbys, those foods that are our family favorites, and that we can cook almost without thinking. We likely enjoy reading recipes, but often avoid trying new and unusual dishes (unless, of course, we're entertaining!)

Fresh herbs are not necessarily associated with complex or exotic foods. Their flavors are best appreciated in simple every day dishes. Salads and sauces can

take on a delightful and fresh appeal simply by adding a little basil, lovage, chives, or dill. Improve your dips and dressings with the addition of minced parsley, chives, basil, oregano, chervil, or garlic.

Neutral tasting foods like rice, potatoes, and pasta benefit from the addition of fresh herbs. Flavorful green herbs improve both the look and the taste of foods such as fish, chicken, pasta and egg dishes. Often, tossing in a few herbs turns a familiar dish into a little journey of discovery for your taste buds.

You need no special tools in order to cook with fresh herbs. The only utensils you'll need are a pair of sharp scissors, a sharp knife, a wooden chopping board and a fine sieve. Add to that a mortar and pestle, a garlic mincer and a small food processor or herb grinder, and you're well supplied to get cooking.

When you are using fresh herbs, save the leaves, flowers or seeds, and either discard the tougher stems or set them aside to add flavor to soup stocks. Snip the leaves right over the pot or dish. For larger amounts, mince a pile of leaves with a sharp knife. For recipes like pesto, when you need a large quantity of fresh herbs, a small food processor is an essential tool.

You can substitute your fresh herbs for dried herbs in recipes. Since fresh herbs are bulkier and contain more water than dried ones, use at least double the amount called for. This will give you a comparable amount of the flavorful essential oils.

HANDY HINTS FOR COOKING WITH HERBS

Just to get you started, the following hints can help you incorporate your fresh herbs into your cooking:

- ✧ Sprinkle omelettes with freshly minced herbs before you fold them. Try cheese and herb combinations like feta and marjoram or Parmesan and basil, chives and cheddar.
- ✧ Crush and rub fresh herbs like marjoram or lemon basil onto fish or chicken, and allow it to marinate for 30 minutes before you grill it.
- ✧ Add 1 teaspoon of fresh basil or dill to a cup of mayonnaise for a special sandwich or burger spread.
- ✧ Insert fresh sprigs of parsley, oregano, rosemary or thyme under the skin of a chicken or turkey before roasting it.
- ✧ Insert slivers of garlic and small sprigs of rosemary into slits made in lamb before roasting.

Start with the herbs you already like, and branch out. Soon you'll find that herbs will become as basic to your meal preparations as salt and pepper.

HERB BUTTERS

Make your own herb butters - it is one of the simplest ways to add flavor to foods. Herb butters are fragrant and colorful spreads, delicious on warm biscuits and freshly baked bread. They are equally at home on steamed vegetables, poultry, and fish. Use them to make savory sandwiches, on roast or mashed potatoes, and to baste grilled fish, chicken or steak.

Begin with sweet or unsalted butter that you have let soften at room temperature. Choose the herbs you will use, and wash and dry them thoroughly. Then mince them finely. You can use herbs singly or in combinations. Blend in the herbs and any other seasonings by hand or with an electric mixer.

Chill the herbed butter for at least three hours before you serve it. Pack the herb butter into a crock or mold or formed into a log, wrapped and stored up to one month in the refrigerator. To use your savory butter, carve out balls with a melon baller, slice off circles from the log, or shave curls from the butter with a sharp knife.

Here are some ideas for making your own herb butters.

Make simple two-herb butters.

Suggestions for the herbs are as follows: mint with dill, chives with lovage, marjoram with garlic, parsley with lemon zest. Blend one tablespoon of the selected herbs with 1/2 cup or 4 ounces of soft butter.

Mixed Herb Butter 1

- ⌘ 1 teaspoon each minced fresh marjoram, thyme and rosemary
- ⌘ 1/4 teaspoon each minced fresh garlic basil and sage
- ⌘ 1/2 cup or 4 ounces unsalted butter, softened to room temperature

Mixed Herb Butter 2

- ⌘ 1/2 cup each minced fresh parsley and lovage
- ⌘ 1 1/2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme
- ⌘ 1/2 teaspoon each minced fresh sage, marjoram and garlic
- ⌘ freshly ground pepper to taste
- ⌘ 1 cup or 8 ounces of unsalted butter, softened to room temperature

Green Butter

- ⌘ 1/4 cup or 2 ounces of softened and unsalted butter
- ⌘ one half garlic clove and 2 small green onions, pounded to a pulp with a mortar and pestle
- ⌘ 1/4 cup finely chopped chervil
- ⌘ six sprigs of parsley, stems removed and finely chopped
- ⌘ a pinch of cayenne

Steak Butter

- ⌘ 1/4 cup or 2 ounces of softened butter
- ⌘ 2 tablespoons finely chopped chervil
- ⌘ 1 teaspoon finely chopped tarragon
- ⌘ two lovage leaves, finely chopped

Make sure that you wash, dry and finely chop the herbs you have chosen. This is where an herb grinder or small food processor comes in handy.

As you might have noticed in the combinations above, use strongly flavored herbs in smaller quantities than the milder flavored ones. Adjust to your taste.

Make your own recipes to suit your tastes or your menu. If fresh herbs are not available, you can substitute one and a half teaspoons of dried herbs per tablespoon of fresh herbs. However, you will lose that fresh green appearance, and even some flavor.

SALAD DRESSINGS

Homemade salad dressings are infinitely superior, both nutritionally and flavorfully (is that a word?) to commercial ones. They are simple to make yourself, and by reducing the oil in half you can limit calories. Use any single herb or combination to suit your menu.

These homemade dressings can easily double as a marinade for poultry, meats and fish. Toss root vegetables with them, and roast them for both delicious and nutritious vegetables.

Combine the ingredients together in a jar with a tight fitting lid. Shake the ingredients together 30 minutes before serving.

French Vinaigrette Dressing

- ⌘ 2 tablespoons minced fresh tarragon, washed and dried well
- ⌘ 3/4 cup olive oil, organic and extra-virgin
- ⌘ 1/4 cup vinegar, can be a combination of red wine vinegar, white wine vinegar, or apple cider vinegar

Mixed Herb Dressing

- ⌘ 3/4 cup of extra-virgin olive oil
- ⌘ 1/4 cup vinegar, either white wine vinegar or apple cider vinegar
- ⌘ 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- ⌘ 2 tablespoons each fresh basil, thyme, savory and marjoram, finely chopped
- ⌘ one garlic clove, minced
- ⌘ 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Herb and Yogurt Dressing

- ⌘ 2 tablespoons minced fresh herbs (parsley, mint and chives work well)
- ⌘ 1 cup plain yogurt
- ⌘ 1/4 cup apple cider vinegar
- ⌘ 1/4 cup olive oil

For all of the above dressings, mix the ingredients together by shaking them in a jar – that gives you a handy storage container for any left over. Dressings with fresh herbs will keep in the refrigerator for a week to 10 days, although I find we use them up much more quickly!

HERBAL PESTO SAUCES

Use the fresh herbs you grow in your herb garden to make some flavorful sauces. Sauces that are highly seasoned with herbs are an important part of Mediterranean cooking, which is one of the healthiest ways to cook.

Most sauces include olive oil, but yogurt and cream can be used as a base. Nutritious nuts are another common ingredient.

Here are three pesto sauces that you can whip up in minutes from your own organic herbs and a few other common ingredients.

Use them as sauces for pasta, on pizza in place of tomato sauce, spread on sandwiches, atop vegetables, added to oil and vinegar as flavorful vinaigrette or mixed with butter as an herbal butter.

Basil Pesto:

- ⌘ 1 cup fresh basil leaves
- ⌘ 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
- ⌘ 1/4 cup Parmesan cheese, grated
- ⌘ 3 tablespoons of blanched almonds or pine nuts
- ⌘ a pinch of salt.

Combine all the ingredients in a blender or food processor until smooth. If the sauce seems too thick, add a little more olive oil.

Cilantro Pesto:

This is a spicier pesto, good with Mexican dishes, in soups or on sandwiches.

- ⌘ 1 cup fresh cilantro leaves
- ⌘ 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
- ⌘ 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- ⌘ 1 jalapeno, seeded and chopped (optional)
- ⌘ 2 garlic cloves
- ⌘ 3 tablespoons pine nuts, walnuts or blanched almonds

Combine the ingredients in a blender or food processor.

Parsley Pesto:

This pesto has a fresh taste, good on fish, vegetables or in soups.

- ⌘ 1 cup fresh flat leaf parsley, leaves only
- ⌘ 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
- ⌘ 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- ⌘ 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- ⌘ 3 tablespoons pine nuts or blanched almonds

Combine the ingredients in a blender or food processor. Chill the pesto before serving. Fresh pesto will keep for up to 5 days in the refrigerator, although the surface may discolor unless you add a covering of olive oil on top.

I like to make a big batch of pesto, and transfer it into ice cube trays. By freezing it and storing it in a container in the freezer, you can have pesto any time. Drop the cubes into pasta sauces, thaw them and use them on pizza, or add them to soups at the last minute.

A taste of summer in mid-winter!

HERBAL VINEGARS AND OILS

It's easy to make delicious herbal oils and vinegars from the herbs in your garden. Use these flavored oils and vinegars to add a different taste and zest to marinades and salad dressings. You can use the either fresh or dried herbs in making them.



The supplies you'll need for making herb vinegar are as follows:

- ✧ Sterilized glass jar, with lid
- ✧ Sprigs or stems of your home-grown, organic herbs
- ✧ a vinegar of your choice

Most types of vinegar work well, but try to match the vinegar to the herb. More delicately flavored herbs go well with white wine or champagne wine vinegars, while a stronger-flavored herb like tarragon or rosemary would work well with zesty red wine vinegar.

Apple cider vinegar or regular (white) vinegar both have a strong “bitey” flavor already, so you'll have to compensate for that flavor when trying different flavor combinations of the herbs you want to use.

Prepare your herbs by harvesting them in early morning, washing them gently and drying them thoroughly. They must be completely dry before you add the vinegar.

Place the herb sprigs inside the jar and pour in your choice of vinegar, completely covering the herbs. Fasten the lid tightly, and let your herb vinegar stand for about six weeks. Strain out the herbs and return the clear, flavored vinegar to a clean and sterilized container. It's now ready to use for cooking or

salad dressing.

You can also use your organically grown herbs to make organic herb oil. Herb oil is excellent to use on salads and to add extra flavor for cooking. Herbal oil also makes a fantastic dip for bread. Some herb oils can also make wonderfully fragrant bath oils, or depending on the oil you use, as skin moisturizers.

Words of caution, when it comes to herb oil – keep it refrigerated and use it quickly.

Herb oil is an ideal medium for bacteria to grow in, including certain fatal bacteria. It is imperative you refrigerate your herb oil. Keep the unused herb oil from fresh herbs for no more than two weeks; after that, discard it.

Mark a date on the jar so you know how long you have had the oil, and if left out of the refrigerator, throw it away!

By using dried herbs, your herbal oil is much less likely to be contaminated with bacteria. If you prepare your herb oil with fully dried herbs, you can store the unused herb oil in the refrigerator for up to four weeks. Again, when the four weeks are up, throw it away!

To make herb oil you will need a sterilized jar or bottle with a lid, oil, and your home-grown, organic herbs (either fresh, frozen, or dried). Remember, if you use dried herbs, you'll be able to store the unused portion in the refrigerator longer, and there is little chance of introducing bacteria or fungus, as there is with fresh herbs.

If you plan to use the herb oil primarily for cooking or salads, I recommend you use extra virgin olive oil. It is possible to use other oils such as almond, grape seed, sunflower and avocado oils. Never use mineral oil. Jojoba oil is a good choice if you plan to make a bath or cosmetic oil.

One method is to heat the oil gently in a double boiler, and add your prepared herbs. Do not allow the oil to get too hot, as it will change the flavor and quality of the oil. Let the oil and herb mixture cool, and leave it for about a week in the refrigerator for the flavor to disperse throughout the oil.

Remove the herbs by straining the oil. Add a few drops of Vitamin E oil, and pour the flavored oil into the sterilized jar or bottle and screw the lid on tightly. Label it with the date and refrigerate. Whenever you use the herbal oil, make sure you return it to the refrigerator promptly.

HERBS AND SAUCES

Sauces enhance the dishes they accompany. The added herbs also make foods more easily digested. For example, serve mint sauce with lamb, which is often difficult to digest. A fennel sauce with fish will help in digesting the oils in fish. Use herbs generously in making your sauces.

Many sauces begin with a simple roux. Roux (pronounced "roo") is one of the basic thickening agents in cooking. Used primarily for thickening sauces and soups, make your roux from equal parts fat and flour.

Melt the fat (usually butter) in a saucepan over medium heat, and slowly add the flour, stirring constantly. A thick paste will form. Cook it until the flour taste is gone. The roux should be light in color. For a darker sauce, cook the roux longer.

Béchamel Sauce:

Pour 1 cup each of milk and stock into a saucepan. Add 1 shallot, a bouquet of thyme, parsley and bay leaf, and a few peppercorns. Bring to a boil slowly. Strain before using, and keep it hot.

Make a roux with 2 tablespoons of butter and 2 tablespoons of flour in another saucepan. Add the liquid slowly, and whisk it until it reaches the boiling point. Allow it to simmer for 20 minutes.

Dill Sauce for Fish:

Make a roux with 2 tablespoons each of butter and flour. Add 1/2 cup of cream slowly, stirring until it is smooth. Add 1 cup of hot stock and 2 tablespoons of chopped dill. Simmer very low for 15 minutes before serving.

Fennel Sauce for Fish:

Make 1 cup of béchamel sauce, and add 1/4 cup of coarsely chopped fennel leaves. Do not allow it to boil once you have added the fennel.

Tarragon Sauce:

In a saucepan, add 1 cup of milk and 1 cup of stock. Add one shallot and about 2 tablespoons of chopped tarragon leaves. Season the liquid with salt and cayenne pepper. Bring this to a boil and keep it hot.

Meanwhile, make a roux with 2 tablespoons each of butter and flour. Mix in 1 teaspoon of lemon juice, 1/2 teaspoon of prepared mustard and 1 teaspoon of mayonnaise. Add the milk and stock slowly, stirring until the sauce is smooth

and creamy. Finish the sauce by adding a tablespoon of chopped parsley.

Italian Tomato Sauce:

In a large saucepan, place 8 peeled and chopped tomatoes, 1 tablespoon chopped chives, 2 lovage leaves, several basil leaves, a sprig of thyme and a bunch of parsley. Add 1/2 cup of pure olive oil, and a pinch of salt and pepper. Bring to a boil, then simmer, stirring, until the sauce is thick and creamy.

You may want to strain it before serving if you like a smooth sauce, or simply remove any stems from the thyme and serve as-is.

Mint Sauce:

Fresh mint leaves make a delicious mint sauce to serve with lamb. Strip a good-sized handful of mint leaves (about a half cup) from the stems and chop them finely, or whirl them in a food processor, along with a teaspoon of sugar. Transfer to a bowl, and stir in 2 tablespoons of boiling water and 2 tablespoons of white vinegar. Allow the mixture to stand for 30 minutes before serving.

PRESERVING WITH HERBS

Both fresh and dried herbs are common ingredients in some preserves and pickles. Make savory jellies and specially preserved herbs to have flavors of your herbs all winter long. Add fresh herbs to your vegetables as you preserve or pickle them.

Here are three examples:

Bottled Tomatoes:

Ripe tomatoes, picked at the height of their season, have an intense flavor. They make a valuable preserve, savored in winter months when fresh tomatoes are either unavailable or tasteless.

- ⌘ 10 pounds of ripe tomatoes, 3 pounds coarsely chopped
- ⌘ 2 small onions, chopped
- ⌘ 1 bouquet garni (thyme and oregano sprigs and 2 bay leaves)
- ⌘ 1/4 cup fresh lemon juice
- ⌘ Salt
- ⌘ 3/4 cup fresh basil leaves

Put the chopped tomatoes, onions, bouquet garni and lemon juice in a stainless or enameled pot. Season with salt, Stir to blend and allow to cook over low heat for 20 minutes.

Core the whole tomatoes and dip into boiling water to loosen the skins. Peel them, cut them in half, and squeeze the seeds into the sauce. Pack the halved tomatoes into preserving jars, adding a bouquet of basil leaves to the jar.

Strain the sauce to remove skins and seeds. Fill each jar to within 1/2 inch from the top with sauce, cover and process.

Basil Preserved in Oil:

By preserving basil this way, you can use it in recipes where you would use salt and oil along with basil.

- ⌘ 2 cups basil leaves, washed and dried
- ⌘ 2 tablespoons salt
- ⌘ 1/2 cup olive oil

Put a layer of basil leaves in a jar, sprinkle with salt, and continue making layers until the jar is about 3/4 full. Fill with olive oil, and seal the jar. Store in a closed cupboard, and allow to rest for about 3 weeks before using.

Herb Jelly:

Flavor this jelly with any herb you desire – tarragon, mint, thyme, marjoram, rosemary – or with whole seeds such as cloves or coriander.

- ☪ 6 pounds of tart apples, coarsely chopped
- ☪ Sugar
- ☪ 20 sprigs fresh sage (or other herb)

Cook the apples in a large stainless steel or enamel pan, adding just enough water to cover them. Use medium heat, and cook until soft – about 30 minutes. Pour the cooked apples into a jelly bag, hang over a bowl and allow the juice to drip out overnight.

Measure the juice, and add 2 cups of sugar for each 2 1/2 cups of juice. Stir over low heat until the sugar dissolves. Tie the herb sprigs in a muslin or cheesecloth bag, and add to the pan. Bring to a boil, and then simmer until the mixture reaches the jelling point. Remove the herbs, and ladle the jelly into jars. Seal and process.

HERBS AND SALADS

Fresh herbs are particularly good in salads. Not only do herbs, and some edible flowers, make a plain salad more attractive; they add delicate flavors and healthful qualities.

A quarter cup of mixed herbs is an average amount to add for an ordinary-sized green salad for 6 people. Use smaller quantities of more potently flavored herbs, such as marjoram, basil, rosemary, tarragon, thymes, and mints. More delicately flavored herbs, including parsley, lovage, chives, cress and chervil can be used more generously.

Fresh herbs blend well with certain kinds of fruits and vegetables, and can complement the flavors of the salad ingredients.

Here are some ideas to perk up your salads – use either single herbs or a combination of two or three:

- ✽ Avocado, Romano lettuce and grapefruit salad: parsley, tarragon and chervil
- ✽ Bean salads: parsley, lovage and chives
- ✽ Grated beets and carrots: mint, chives and parsley
- ✽ Cabbage and apple coleslaw: caraway, dill, or poppy seeds, parsley
- ✽ Cabbage and carrot coleslaw: anise, parsley, dill, mint, chives, marjoram
- ✽ Cauliflower and broccoli salad: mint and parsley
- ✽ Cucumber salad: dill, chives, fennel, cilantro, nasturtium leaves
- ✽ Egg salad: chives, parsley, tarragon, water cress, thyme, cilantro
- ✽ Endive salad: garlic, parsley, chives
- ✽ Mixed greens: most herbs, nasturtium flowers, seeds of dill and poppy
- ✽ Potato salad: basil, chives, dill, lovage, oregano, parsley, mint, garlic
- ✽ Tomato salad: basil, chervil, parsley, oregano, tarragon

✧ Fruit salads: mints, lemon balm, cilantro, coriander seeds

Most of the combinations of vegetables and herbs listed above can be served as-is, or over a bed of fresh greens. With the mixes of lettuces, field greens and herbs available fresh today, there is no excuse for a boring and plain salad.

HERBAL TEAS

What could be more invigorating than filling your teapot with a blend of fresh herbs, and enjoying an early morning cup of herbal tea from your own tea herb garden!

Each day you could make a different brew - citrus flavored lemony herbs like lemon verbena and lemon balm, refreshing peppermint or spearmint, a tonic of sage and yarrow flower. The combinations are endless, if you grow your own tea herbs.

You will find your blends vary with the seasons. Summer teas may include lemon or cinnamon basil, along with tender pineapple sage and a bit of scented geranium. The pushy mint plants will provide you with zesty leaves spring, summer and fall. In winter, you can use the herbs you have dried, and still enjoy your favorite blends.

Your garden grown herbal teas have several benefits.

First, they are fresh, and grown free of pesticides and other chemicals often used in commercial growing and processing. They cost next to nothing, beyond the initial cost of the seeds or starter plants. In addition, you can grow a variety of herbs for tea, giving you an unlimited number of tea blends to enjoy.

Brew your herbal teas mainly from fresh or dried leaves; but you can include some flowers or seeds. Calendula flowers, rose petals and spikes of lavender make tasty teas. Make a bouillon-type tea with dill seeds and chive flowers, along with parsley and other savoury leaves.

Some of the easiest tea herbs to grow are:

Mint - This cooling and refreshing plant will need restraining in your garden, since all mints are rapid runners. The active ingredient in mint act on the digestive system, helping with nausea, cramps and abdominal pains. Choose three or more varieties, such as spearmint, apple mint, peppermint, pineapple mint and ginger mint, and plant them in a half-barrel. In fall, cut and dry the leafy stalks for winter teas.

Chamomile - Sprinkle some chamomile seeds on any soil, and you'll have chamomile forever. Harvest the flowers for teas, either as buds or as full blooms, and dry them. Be careful not to over-steep the tea, as it will get bitter. Chamomile blends well with spearmint or lemon balm, and makes a calming tea.

Bergamot - This decorative herb, often grown for its gorgeous color, requires

moist fertile soil. Use the leaves in blends with other herbs, or even with black tea. It's the flavor in Earl Grey.

Roses - Not usually thought of as a tea herb, the hips or rose fruit are brewed for a tea rich in vitamin C. The hips from rugosas or wild roses make the best teas. Cut dried rosehips in half and scoop out the seeds and fibers before you brew them. Once dried, you can pulverize the hard hips in the blender. You can also use fresh rosehips to make a tea.

Lemon Herbs - Three lemon-scented and flavored herbs add a citrus tang to your herb teas. They are lemon balm, lemon verbena and lemon grass. The first two are perennials, and make great tea either fresh or dried. Lemon grass is a tropical plant, which you can grow in a container. Just a few spears make a mild and delicious lemony tea.

As a rule, steep your herbal teas longer than green or black tea. You will have to experiment to get the right depth of flavor, since taste varies from herb to herb. Some, like sage and rosemary are stronger and more bitter, while lemon balm and anise-hyssop are milder.

Teas you brew from your own garden grown herbs are as varied as your imagination, and a little experimental brewing and sipping will be necessary to find your perfect blends.

RECIPES TO GET YOU STARTED

To learn about herbs, you have to use them. Each of us has our own tastes, and part of the adventure of cooking is experiment and try out new ingredients, flavors and recipes.

Rather than including an extensive recipe section, I have only included a few recipes to get you started. Once you have developed the habit of using your fresh herbs, you will soon be branching out and developing your own recipes.

APPETIZER: TOMATO BASIL BRUSCHETTA

12 servings

- ✪ 6 Roma tomatoes, diced
- ✪ 1/2 cup oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, chopped
- ✪ 3 cloves minced garlic
- ✪ 2 tablespoons olive oil
- ✪ 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- ✪ 1/4 cup fresh basil leaves, chopped roughly
- ✪ 1/4 teaspoon salt
- ✪ 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
- ✪ Grated mozzarella or other mild cheese
- ✪ 1 baguette

Preheat the oven on broiler setting.

In a large bowl, combine the roma tomatoes, sun-dried tomatoes, garlic, olive oil, vinegar, basil, salt, and pepper. Allow the mixture to sit for 10 minutes.

Cut the baguette into 3/4-inch slices. Arrange the slices in a single layer, and broil for 1 to 2 minutes, until slightly brown on top. (This prevents the bread from getting soggy.)

Divide the tomato mixture evenly over the baguette slices. Top the slices with grated mozzarella cheese. Broil for 5 minutes, or until the cheese is melted, and serve hot.

GRAIN SALAD: QUINOA TABBOULEH

Serves 6

- ⌘ 2 cups quinoa
- ⌘ 4 cups water
- ⌘ 1/4 teaspoon salt
- ⌘ 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- ⌘ 5 tbsp fresh lemon juice
- ⌘ 1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
- ⌘ 1/2 cup coarsely chopped fresh cilantro leaves
- ⌘ 1/2 cup coarsely chopped fresh parsley
- ⌘ 1 – 2 tablespoons chopped mint leaves
- ⌘ 2 teaspoon minced garlic
- ⌘ 4 plum tomatoes cut into (1/2-dice)
- ⌘ 1 cup diced (1/2 inch) cucumbers
- ⌘ 1 ripe avocado, pitted, peeled and cut into 1/2 inch dice

Place quinoa in a medium-sized pan, add the water, and bring to a boil.

Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer, covered, until the liquid is absorbed, 12 to 15 minutes - the quinoa should be translucent. Remove from heat and fluff it with a fork. Transfer it to a large bowl and cool to room temperature.

Sprinkle the quinoa with the salt and pepper. Fold 4 tablespoons of the lemon juice and the oil. Gently fold in the cilantro, parsley, mint and garlic.

Toss the avocado with remaining tablespoon of lemon juice to prevent discoloration. Fold tomatoes, cucumbers and avocado into the quinoa.

Adjust the seasonings to taste. Serve at room temperature within 2 hours of preparation.

Variations: Use cooked rice, orzo or bulgur instead of quinoa.

FISH: HERB-TOMATO TOPPED FISH FILLETS

Serves 2

Possible herb combinations include chives, basil, fennel, dill, lemon thyme, parsley and tarragon.

- ✧ 1 lb. fresh fish fillets (halibut, snapper or other mild fish)
- ✧ 5 tablespoons minced fresh herbs
- ✧ 2 garlic cloves, minced
- ✧ 1 teaspoon lime or lemon juice
- ✧ 1 tablespoon olive oil
- ✧ 1 cup coarse bread crumbs (or cracker crumbs)
- ✧ 1 tomato, chopped
- ✧ 1/4 cup grated parmesan

Preheat the oven to 400F.

Combine herbs, garlic, limejuice and oil in a small bowl. Set aside.

In a food processor or blender, gently blend the crumbs, tomato and parmesan, just until mixed.

Oil a baking dish, and place the fillets in it in a single layer. Top with the herb mixture, then the crumb mixture.

Cover loosely with foil, and bake on the top oven rack for 10 minutes or slightly longer if the fillets are thick. Remove the foil, lower the rack, and broil for 2 minutes, until just browned.

SEAFOOD: HERBED PRAWNS

Serves 2 as a main dish, 4 as an appetizer

- ⌘ 1 pound fresh prawns, peeled
- ⌘ 1 tablespoon avocado oil or olive oil
- ⌘ 1 minced garlic clove
- ⌘ 3/4 cup chopped Roma tomatoes
- ⌘ 1 tablespoon minced fresh chives
- ⌘ 1 teaspoon minced fresh tarragon
- ⌘ 1 tablespoon fresh chervil, minced
- ⌘ Salt and pepper to taste
- ⌘ 1 tablespoon butter

In a large nonstick skillet, cook the prawns in oil for 2 minutes over medium-high heat. Add the minced garlic and cook 1 minute longer. Stir in the tomatoes and tarragon. Cook 3-5 minutes longer or until the prawns are just cooked. Stir in the chives and chervil, and the butter, and stir until the butter melts.

POULTRY: MARINATED AND GRILLED CHICKEN

Serves 4

Marinade:

- ✧ 5 tablespoons minced fresh herbs (choose from basil, chervil, cilantro, fennel, chives, tarragon, lemon thyme, rosemary)
- ✧ 2 garlic cloves, minced
- ✧ 1 teaspoon fresh ginger, grated
- ✧ 2 teaspoons tamari
- ✧ 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- ✧ 2 tablespoons olive oil
- ✧ 1/4 cup plain yoghurt
- ✧ 1 teaspoon cumin
- ✧ 1/4 teaspoon cayenne
- ✧ Freshly ground pepper

Combine all the marinade ingredients in a bowl.

Cut four boneless and skinless chicken breasts into one-inch chunks. Add them to the marinade, toss to coat, and set in the fridge for up to 2 hours.

Thread the chicken pieces onto skewers and grill on the barbecue for about 6 minutes, turning them over once. You could also broil them in the oven.

MEAT: SAGE PORK CHOPS

Serves 4

- ⌘ 2 teaspoon salt
- ⌘ 1 teaspoon dry sage or minced fresh
- ⌘ 1 teaspoon pepper
- ⌘ 2 T butter
- ⌘ 1 c water or white wine
- ⌘ 2 bouillon cubes
- ⌘ 4 center cut pork chops

Combine the salt, sage and black pepper in a small bowl and rub on both sides of the chops. Melt the butter or margarine in a large skillet over medium high heat and sauté the chops for 5 minutes per side, or until well browned.

Meanwhile, in a separate small saucepan over high heat, combine the water and the bouillon and stir until bouillon dissolves. Add this to the chops, reduce heat to low, cover and simmer chops for 45 minutes.

VEGETABLES: HERB ROASTED SUMMER VEGETABLES

Serves 4

- ⌘ 1 eggplant, cut into chunks
- ⌘ 3 small zucchini, cut into thick rounds
- ⌘ 2 small red or white onions, cut into quarters
- ⌘ 8 garlic cloves, peeled and whole
- ⌘ Olive oil
- ⌘ 1/4 cup finely chopped rosemary, oregano, marjoram and thyme
- ⌘ Salt and pepper
- ⌘ 4 roma tomatoes, quartered or 16 grape tomatoes

Preheat the oven to 350F.

In a large bowl, add all the vegetables, and enough olive oil to coat them thoroughly. Add the chopped herbs, and season with salt and pepper. Set them in a single layer in a roasting pan or casserole dish, and roast, covered for 45 minutes.

Add the tomatoes, and continue to roast 15 to 20 minutes more.

Serve over pasta or rice.

BREADS: ITALIAN HERB BREAD

Makes 2 loaves

- ✪ 1 tablespoon dry yeast
- ✪ 2 cups warm water
- ✪ 1 tablespoon sugar or honey
- ✪ 1/4 cup olive oil
- ✪ 2 teaspoons fine sea salt
- ✪ 2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil
- ✪ 2 tablespoons chopped fresh oregano
- ✪ 1 tablespoon chopped fresh rosemary
- ✪ 1 teaspoon garlic powder or fresh minced garlic
- ✪ 1/2 cup freshly grated Romano or parmesan cheese
- ✪ 1/2 cup sliced black olives
- ✪ 3 cups all-purpose flour
- ✪ 3 cups spelt flour

Mix yeast, warm water and sugar together in a large bowl. Set aside for five minutes, or until mixture becomes foamy. Stir in olive oil, salt, herbs, garlic powder, cheese, olives and 3 cups flour into the yeast mixture.

Gradually mix in next three cups of flour. (Dough will be stiff). Knead for 5 to 10 minutes, or until it is smooth and elastic. Place in an oiled bowl, turning to cover sides with oil. Cover with a damp towel, or plastic wrap. Let rise for 1 hour, or until dough has doubled.

Punch down to release all the air. Shape into two loaves. Place loaves on a greased cookie sheet, or into two 9x5 inch, greased pans. Allow rising for 1/2 hour again, until doubled.

Bake at 350 degrees for 35 minutes. Remove loaves from pans and let cool on

wire racks for at least 15 minutes, before slicing.

SOUP: CHIVE AND CHEDDAR SOUP

Serves 6

- ⌘ 8 cups vegetable or chicken stock
- ⌘ 3 large potatoes, peeled and cubed
- ⌘ 1 head of broccoli or cauliflower, broken into florets
- ⌘ 1 white onion, chopped
- ⌘ 2 tablespoons butter
- ⌘ 6 ounces cheddar cheese, shredded
- ⌘ 1/2 cup chives, minced
- ⌘ 1/4 cup parsley, minced
- ⌘ 1 tablespoon fresh tarragon leaves, minced
- ⌘ 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg,
- ⌘ salt and white pepper to taste

Sauté the onion in butter and set it aside.

Combine the stock and potatoes in a heavy soup pot and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 10 minutes.

Add the broccoli or cauliflower and continue simmering for several minutes more or until tender. Add the onion and butter mixture, parsley and tarragon.

Remove from heat and blend ingredients with an immersion blender until smooth.

Reheat on low. Add the cheese, chives, nutmeg, salt and pepper. Stir until cheese melts, and serve topped with fresh chives and a dollop of yoghurt.



Now it is your turn. Grow your own culinary herbs and find inventive and delicious ways to include them in your meals.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Nicolette Goff was born in British Columbia's Rocky Mountains. As she grew up a small farm (one of 9 children) in the '50's, organic gardening became important part of her life. It continues to be one of her passions today. Gardening naturally led to an interest in cooking healthy meals and exploring different cuisines.

Her experiences and adventures as an elementary school teacher and librarian for 12 years expanded her passion for learning, traveling and writing. She joined her husband Dennis in a photography business in Alberta that kept them both constantly on the move as they raised their two daughters.

Fast forward a dozen years, and you would find them in Ecuador where she fell in love with the high Andean villages, the creative local people, the history and culture. They both love to spend weeks there exploring the artisan-centered villages and local markets. It was here she discovered the numerous health benefits of quinoa.

Currently living on beautiful Vancouver Island, Nicolette enjoys travel to places off the beaten path.

Gardening, hiking, painting, writing, reading, cooking and having fun with her two daughters and three grandchildren also rank high on her list of favorite activities.

Visit her garden website: "[Through Nana's Garden Gate](#)"

NICOLETTE'S OTHER BOOKS:

[Easy Quinoa Recipes](#)

[The Healthy Quinoa Cookbook](#)

[How to Preserve and Enjoy Your Garden Herbs](#)

[The Under Cover Gardening Guide](#)

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