

# Herbs



## **Short Guide To Growing Culinary Herbs**

The  
Garden  
Guy

# Herbs



## Grow Your Own Herbs !

What a treat to be able to step out of your kitchen, or reach into a sunny window sill, and pinch off a fresh sprig of just the right herb to flavor your dinner dish !

Your personal Herb Garden might be the easiest and most useful part of your overall garden. Easy, because they grow anywhere there is well drained soil and full to part sun. Your Herb Garden can be as simple as the traditional eight shelf herb pot to a Eden like garden bed. Useful, because many herbs can be relied on to offer you more menu solutions and inspiration - year round !

Part of why Herbs are so easily cultivated is because unlike spices, herbs are just a snip away from the pot or bowl. Spices, generally the seed, berry or bark of a parent plant require processing ( usually drying and grinding ) before they can be utilized in your kitchen. Herbaceous plants ( aka herbs) can range from the delicate and seasonally sensitive Basil to the tenacious Rosemary that can be picked almost anytime.

Based on personal history and my association with other gardeners and cooks you might consider these plants to be the backbone of your culinary Herb Garden:

Basil ( Sweet )

Chives ( Green or Garlic )

Dill

Garlic

Loverage

Marjoram

Mint

Oregano

Parsley

Rosemary

Sage

Savory

Tarragon

Thyme ( Common )

# Herbs



## Locating and Preparing Your Culinary Herb Garden

Herbaceous plants, especially those we favor, are survivors. When considering where to locate your Herb Garden don't rule out that rocky patch you have been ignoring. For most of the herbs in this guide, poor, rocky soil can be a good start so long as it is in FULL SUN. A few herbs, like tender basil, will appreciate a soil amended with a 50/50 mix of compost. And, if one end or the other gets a little shade in the late afternoon, you can find at least one herb that will like that location in your herb garden. A final thought on location. If the site you select is a few steps from your kitchen . . . so much the better !

In any case, you should perform a perk test before proceeding. Dig 4-5 holes 1 foot deep and spaced evenly around your bed. Fill holes with water and come back in 24 hours. If the water is still standing in the holes . . . find another location. If drained completely, you can then " dig in " your garden with the confidence that your herbs will not drown.

Poor as it might be, the soil of your Herb Garden has to be worked. Try to turn it all about 1 garden spade or fork deep. If there is a lot of heavy clay, or "hard pan " break it up as best you can and mix in a few shovelfuls of compost. You don't have to over do this as you will top layer with compost each year around each of the perennial herbs you plant. Remove any sizable rocks. If they, or any rocks you have collected strike your fancy, set them randomly among your herbs, or use as an informal border.

# Herbs



## **Plant Your Herbs In Almost Anything**

Container gardening wouldn't be nearly as fun if there were only one shape and size to choose from. But, time, taste and technology have given us a wealth of shapes and sizes to help us set the stage on our patios, decks and porches

The Traditional Flower Pot is shaped to easily plant and replant flowers, shrubs and trees.

There is a wide variety of cylindrically shaped pots designed to offer more style and shapes as a simple container. Typically these more stylish pots are enhanced with added textures, attachments and often irresistible color combinations.

For exceptionally large plants or planting Tub style planters are more suitable. With a few exceptions, tubs have the benefits offered by the inwardly slopping walls of a traditional pot.

Flower pots, a common garden container come in varying sizes. Traditional flower pots can range from 3 in diameter violet pots on your window sill to the giant concrete pots in the courtyard of a skyscraper. Raised beds can be as small as 2 feet by 4 feet, and as long as 16 to 20 feet depending on the base area and budget.

Garden containers come in a wondrous multitude of shapes from an old boot, copper tub, to abandoned toilet.

Regardless of shape or size, each container should be chosen for those characteristics which lean to the successful cultivation of a healthy plant . . . including Herbs !



Sweet Basil

**Basil** Every home should have a pot of basil growing some where. Kept by the back door, or on a kitchen window sill the aroma of basil will keep troublesome mosquitoes and flies at bay while keeping their sweetly perfumed leaves at the ready for your cooking pot. Give basil a second chance as one of your own dried provisions. Keep flower buds pinched out !  
**Full to part sun. Well drained soil. Fertilize twice a season.**



Chives

**Chives** Nothing adds zip like a snipping of fresh chive in salads, and baked potatoes. Related to the onion, chives grow in clumps. Take snips from the top and retain its grass like replishments. Give chives a second chance as one of your own dried provisions. Chives gone to flower, lose their flavor potency. Save chives for a the fresh, uncooked garnish or freeze for a couple of week until needed.

**Full to part sun. Well drained soil. Fertilize twice a season.**

**SKIP'S TIP** *Make your own Chive Salt. Mix chopped chives to sea salt. Put the blend in a 180° oven and bake to dry chives and blend the flavors. Great on almost anything !*



Dill

**Dill** Want to have a memorable picnic ? Put a sprig of fresh dill in your picnic basket ! This is the herb that was always in grandma's garden. Sprinkle seeds in a corner, or along the back of the bed. Watch it grow and keep it picked all season. Bee's love its tinglely aroma and you will too.

**Full to part sun. Well drained soil. Fertilize twice a season.**



Garlic

**Garlic** To say that many people have an affection for garlic is an understatement. Raw, roasted or pickled this is the favorite herb of all time. Start from seeds or sprout faster planting cloves. Encourage the green "leaves" and discourage flowers.

**Full to part sun. Well drained deeply cultivated soil. Fertilize twice a season.**



Loverage

**Loverage** Easier to grow than Celery, Loverage imparts a similar taste to most recipes calling for its bundled cousin. Leaves, stems, and seeds all taste like celery. Use it fresh in salads, fresh or dried in soups or sauces. It serves well as unexpected garnish on tomatoes, rice, creamed soups and steamed vegetables. This perennial herb dies back in winter, only to return more robust the next year. Clip young leaves and stems to discourage flowering

**Full to part sun. Well drained soil. Fertilize with compost in Spring.**



Marjoram

**Marjoram** Sweet marjoram, much like basil, is usually planted as an annual. This versatile herb is something like a mild oregano with a hint of balsam. Use it fresh or dried to add a little savory flavor to meat, poultry, fish, vegetables. Add it to stews, sautes, marinades, dressings, herb butters, and flavoring vinegars or oils.

**Full to part sun. Dryer, drained soil. Fertilize twice a season.**

**SKIP'S TIP** *Make your own Chive Salt. Mix chopped chives to sea salt. Put the blend in a 180° oven and bake to dry chives and blend the flavors. Great on almost anything ! tasty fruit salad dressing.*



Mint

**Mint** Because it has a bad reputation for taking over a garden bed, mint doesn't have the following of other culinary herbs. With nearly a dozen recognized varieties, and differing flavors, we focus here on common Field Mint. Mint is commonly used to add "sweet" flavors to candy, drinks, jellies, meats, and a host of raw or cooked vegetables. **Full to partly sun. Well drained soil. Fertilize twice a season. INVASIVE.**

**SKIP'S TIP** *Easily make a Orange/Mint Vinegar. Add a whole sprig of fresh mint to a quart of white wine vinegar, and drop in a hand full of fresh thick orange rind. Let stand a week. Use a base for a lamb marinade or in an tasty fruit salad dressing.*



Oregano

**Oregano** For many people the first culinary herb that comes to mind is oregano. Sometimes hard to pinpoint as there are so many varieties. More intense than the flavors of its cousin marjoram, oregano is often tempered by blending with an acidic food like tomatoes. Still its flavor lends zip to so many foods, omelets to vegetable, to beef and poultry. It is often the companion to garlic, thyme, parsley and olive oil. **Full sun. Well drained soil. Fertilize with compost side dressings.**





Tarragon

**Tarragon** An uncommon herb with an uncommonly great taste. This pungent herb is at the heart of Green Goddess dressing, fresh or infused in a white vinegar. A top pick for infusions. Food writer Craig Claiborne has called it “seductive and satisfying”. Be this as it may, this strong herb can fight, and even overcome its culinary herb companions. The Garden Guy is a big fan of Tarragon. It goes so well with everything from meats and potatoes to mayonnaise mixtures. But, don't be heavy handed with this flavor. When cooking in soups or stews, add tarragon in the last 15 minutes to keep it from getting bitter.

**Full to part shade. Rich, sandy drained soil. Fertilize with compost in Spring.**

**SKIP'S TIP** *Try this Fish Salad. Combine poached haddock, crumbled feta cheese, pitted green olive slices, and fresh tarragon to taste. Top with a garlic vinaigrette. Yum !*



Thyme

**Thyme (Common)** This herb is a favorite of many cooks looking to add a nice savory finish to a favorite dish. Thyme is a perennial. But, if it becomes a favorite fresh snip, plant a reserve bush, or have a starter pot ready to be pressed into service. A healthy thyme plant will round out your sunny Herb bed. But, It will also feel right at home on a light filled east facing window sill. Have a little extra space in your Herb Garden? Try planting *Lemon Thyme*. You may find this becomes your new favorite fresh herb.

**Full to part shade. Rich, sandy drained soil. Fertilize with compost in Spring.**



Parsley

**Parsley** There are two main varieties of parsley. Curly leafed parsley is used mainly as a sturdy food plate garnish. Italian flat leaf parsley is more closely associated with the cooling pot. Because it goes to seed the second year, treat parsley as an annual herb.

**Full to part sun. Well drained soil. Fertilize with compost in Spring.**

**SKIP'S TIP** *Instead of drying excess parsley, try freezing chopped flat leaf in ice cube trays - 1 measured tablespoon to a compartment. Just pop a cube in when the cooking recipe calls for fresh chopped parsley.*



Rosemary

**Rosemary** This is the stalwart herb of your kitchen garden ( and a reliable landscape plant ). Because of its rich oils, there is a huge flavor difference between fresh rosemary and dried rosemary. If you like the pungent flavor of rosemary use the fresh. If you are looking for a more subtle blend of this flavor use the dried. Be careful to choose a upright or prostrate ( hanging ) variety depending on the pot or location. Upright in the herb garden keeps it neat and clean and out of the way of other herbs.

**Full to part sun. Well drained soil. Fertilize once a year.**

**SKIP'S TIP** *Cut a long sturdy stem of fresh rosemary. Strip off and save all the leaves: and delete rosemary from your favorite Lamb Kabob recipe. Sharpen one end of stem and skewer on your favorite Kabob ingredients and put it on the grill. Wow !*



Sage

**Sage** Best known for the flavor it brings to the Thanksgiving table, sage is an excellent choice when wanting to bring that savory flavor to poultry, meats and vegetables. Several varieties of sage are available. Some, like Mexican and Golden can be incorporated into your landscaping much like rosemary. Try Pineapple sage to really turn on a chicken, cheese or jelly recipe. Most reward you with a flowery show in addition to its culinary promise. Start sage from transplants.

**Full sun. Well drained enriched soil. Fertilize once a season.**



Savory

**Savory** Choose between summer savory ( annual ) or winter savory ( perennial ). Both have the same culinary contributions. Most gardeners include summer savory in their annual herb bed. It's qualities are better managed grown as an annual. If you want a steady source of this herb, tuck one winter variety somewhere in your garden and replace every third year.

**Full sun. Average, well drained soil. Fertilize w/ compost side dressings.**



## Making The Most Of Your Bountiful Harvest

Many garden herbs have a propensity to be . . . well, bountiful! Rosemary, once it is established, will always be in year round supply. Sage and Oregano can surprise you with its abundance. Even basil can ( especially if you overindulged in your planting ) become a crop whose unused abundance can cause you some guilt. Not to worry. Most herbaceous plantings can be easily preserved in a dried form.

Drying is the oldest form of herb preservation. Early man found it easy to hang his or her favorite flavor enhancer in a warm breeze to dry. Modern man can still rely on the air drying, or he can employ the convenience of commercial dryers or the household oven. In all cases the objective is to remove moisture quickly ( so as to not invite rot ) and still retain remnants of the vital oils from which most herbs get their flavor components. In any case, spray herbs still in the garden with cool, clean water the day before harvesting to assure they are clean and dry before picking for preservation.

### AIR DRIED HERBS

This time honored approach is made possible by the flow of air through leaves and stems to slowly carry away the moisture. This can be as simple as banding a bunch of freshly harvested stems, parting down the middle and suspending off a corrosive free wire or cord. Tying a paper bag over the bundle will shelter herbs from dust and serve as a depository for any leaves that might fall off.

**Full to part sun. Dryer, drained soil. Fertilize twice a season.**

**SKIP'S TIP** *Start the production of your favorite bouquet garni right from the beginning. Gather into a bouquet your herb selections in the proportions you like best, ( taking care to avoid too much of stronger herbs like Oregano ) as they dry they will begin their marriage into the savory flavors of your own bouquet garni. Try assembling: basil, thyme, and Italian parsley; or tarragon and lovage.*



**Grow Light** If you're like me, you can't ever get enough fresh Basil, especially in the middle of winter. The solution, grow your winter supply indoors, under a fluorescent grow light.

All you need is a close by electrical outlet, about a 18 in. x 18 in. of floor or counter space; and some way to adjust the height of the light. This adjustment could be a light on a pulley or as simple as a short stack of bricks ( removing one layer at a time to keep the top of your basil plant away from the light ).

## Basil Indoors

**Water:** Keep evenly moist. Water if you see signs of wilting. Misting every week or so will help.

**Temp:** Warm (around 70°F), NOT HOT !

**Soil:** Loose, potting mix that drains well.

**Fertilizer:** A light "tea" of water soluble fertilizer once a week.

**Light:** Bulb(s) on for 12 hours, with the lights about 2-3 feet from the top of the plant. Off at night.  
Don't let the bulb(s) make contact with the leaves.

You may not have noticed, but the selection of electric grow lights has exploded. With the introduction of LED ( light emitting diode ) bulb technology, the full spectrum of optimum light necessary for healthy, productive plants can be point on ! See what I mean. Just Google grow lights and check out the light styles and sources. So, you can get a sexy hi-tech LED light panel or a simple aluminum reflector work light and the grow light bulb of your choice. Heck, you could even paint the light reflector to add a color accent to the room !

**SKIP'S TIP** *Don't over do this. Keep it real simple the first time. Then, when you are successful and have had some experience with grow light gardening indoors, you can expand into some thing more elaborate that's home made or store bought.*

# Organic Garden Solutions



## Herb & Vegetable Plants and Sets

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Favored By "The Garden Guy"  
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# About The Author

## From A Little Boy

Through my many years, I have perfected my gardening skills and expanded my knowledge and experience as a gardening instructor, speaker, author, certified garden consultant, and most recently blogger.

I was introduced to gardening at the very early age of 8. I lived across the street from a man who gardened his little slice of heaven on about 5 acres of semi-rural property in No. California. Mr. May had everything from honeybees to an orchard, and was very accommodating to the little boy from across the street. I spent hours shadowing Mr. May around his place, asking questions, making mental notes and scurrying across the street to try my hand in my parent's anemic yard. Eventually I got so good at applying Mr. May's know-how that I won the consent of my Mother to tend her flower beds and my Dad gave me a garden plot in the corner of our backyard. I didn't know then that I was attracted to the science of the whole thing, but I could see the results and was very proud of the increase in blooms for my Mom, and the vegetable production that even I could appreciate as abundant. I was hooked.

High school and college left little time or opportunity to get in the dirt. But, I was rewarded and further encouraged by my zoology and botany classes and next tried my hand at tending a garden underneath the high porch and stairs of our apartment in No. New Jersey. It all came back to me and when we finally had our first home I had my first garden plot as an adult. Some early setbacks and a hankering to be more at-one with the earth, led me to the disciplines and sacrifices of French Bio-Intensive Organic Gardening. Yeah, I wore wingtips to work, but I had Berkenstocks in my heart as a young man in the late 70s.

Today, I live on a "rock" in Rocklin, CA and my active gardening is restricted to raised beds ( even my lawn is a raised bed ) and patio containers. But, I do keep up with the latest trends in gardening, the irreversible encroachment of the Government on our garden culture; and most importantly those new to the pleasures of gardening. As a garden consultant in the Garden Center of the world's leading home improvement store chain, I have even gained a faithful following of young adults with first home responsibilities and opportunities: and retired men and women who now have the time, focus, and inclination to finally develop a better understanding of gardening and hopes for its rewards.

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