



HERBS



Tips for the Home Gardener

Herbs are garden plants that are grown and harvested for culinary, aromatic, medicinal, and fibrous uses. Plant herbs in your garden for their unmistakable fragrances, attractive textures, appealing colors, and variety of home uses.

Tips for Growing Herbs

- ☞ Most herbs grow best in full sun, although some will take part shade.
- ☞ Plant herbs in soil with good drainage. Herbs will suffer if grown in beds that remain saturated for an extended period of time. To improve drainage of wet soils, use a layer of crushed rocks topped with a mixture of sand and compost under the planting soil.
- ☞ Fertilize plants lightly with a balanced, slow-release fertilizer in spring. Too much fertilizer will damage the flavor quality of your herbs.
- ☞ Mulch tender herbs in winter to protect them from freezing temperatures. Some very tender herbs may not be winter hardy even with protection, and should be over-wintered indoors. Examples include rosemary, sweet bay, and scented geraniums.
- ☞ For best flavor, harvest herbs in the morning after the dew has dried, but before the hot midday sun evaporates their oils.

Uses for Herbs in the Garden

BORDER GARDENING. Some herbs have attractive flowers, while others have interesting foliage, adding color and texture to the border garden. There are creeping herbs, clumping herbs, and spreading herbs. Experiment with them throughout the garden. Keep in mind that some herbs, such as the mints, tend to be aggressive spreaders and may make better container plants. Herbs with interesting texture include lady's mantle, lamb's ears, chives, sage, and fernleaf tansy. Herbs with appealing foliage coloration include wormwood, curry plant, licorice plant, and bronze fennel.

CONTAINER GARDENING. Many herbs adapt well to containers. Grow them individually or combine them with flowering annuals for added interest. Thyme, licorice plant, sage, and scented geraniums work especially well in containers.

ATTRACTING BUTTERFLIES and HUMMINGBIRDS. If you are a wildlife lover, consider adding herbs to your garden. Parsley and dill are both larval host plants for butterflies. Bergamot (also known as bee balm or horsemint) and scarlet sage are nectar sources for butterflies and hummingbirds. Catmint (catnip), sage, sweet marjoram, and thyme can all be used to entice butterflies to your garden. Remember—gardeners who like butterflies must also have a soft spot for leaf-munching caterpillars.

Herbs for the Home

FLAVOR. Homegrown herbs can add a boost of flavor to foods. They can be used fresh in cooking or dried for use throughout the year. Oregano, dill, parsley, basil, thyme, marjoram, borage, savory, and tarragon will add a zest to your summer salads, barbecues, and other dishes. Plant your favorite mint and add it to iced tea or other refreshing summer drinks.

If you plan on drying and storing your herbs, harvest them just before they bloom when their leaves are at their prime. Place the cuttings in a dry, shady, well-ventilated spot to dry, or spread them on a cookie sheet in a 150° F oven with the door left ajar. Store the dried herbs in airtight containers in a dark place, as exposure to light can cause flavors and colors to degrade.

FRAGRANCE. Any home garden can benefit from the lovely scent of herbs. Herbs with appealing fragrances include lavender, lemon verbena, mint, rosemary, scented geraniums, and sweet woodruff. After harvesting, many herbs can be dried and used in potpourris, simmering pot mixtures, and sachets. To freshen drawers and closets, tie a fragrant mixture of dried herbs into a muslin bag and stash it among your clothes.

FOLK MEDICINE. Before modern medicine, herbs were a main ingredient in many traditional remedies. Today, many people continue to use herbs in this same manner. Common remedies include herbal infusions, which are water-based extracts of herbal plants, and tinctures, which are alcohol-based extracts. Other remedies include bath soaks, compresses, cough syrups, and salves. Beware that many herbs are toxic without proper processing; consult reputable reference sources and your physician before using any herbal preparations.

TEXTILES. Many plants can be used to make fabric and ropes, with cotton and flax being two well-known examples. Other herbs, such as true indigo, can be distilled to produce natural dyes. Time-honored traditions of using herbs for textiles are still practiced in both mass and home production. Consult natural craft books or web pages for ideas about using herbs for artistic endeavors.

Herb or Spice?

Rodale's *Illustrated Encyclopedia of Herbs* offers the following remedies for this age-old question:

- ☞ Leaves, both fresh and dried, are normally called herbs, while seeds, roots, fruits, flowers or bark are spices.
- ☞ Herbs are more frequently grown in temperate regions, while spices usually hail from the tropics.
- ☞ Herbs are green and often impart a subtler flavor; spices tend to be shades of brown, black, or red with a dramatic, pungent flavor.

For example, consider the multi-purpose plant *Coriandrum sativum*. Its tangy leaves are referred to as the herb cilantro (Chinese parsley), but its round brown seeds are known as coriander, a spice.

Longwood's Herb Garden

The Idea Garden boasts a variety of annual and perennial herbs, organized by category of use. Visit the Herb Garden for a living catalog of herbs for a taste of the flavor and charm herbs can add to your home garden. Categories of herbs include textile herbs, culinary herbs, fragrant herbs, and medicinal herbs.

Common and Botanical Names of Herbs

The following table provides the botanical names for herbs recommended in this information sheet.

Common Name	Botanical Name	Characteristics
Basil	<i>Ocimum basilicum</i>	Edible foliage
Bergamot, bee balm, horsemint	<i>Monarda</i> spp.	Attracts butterflies and hummingbirds; edible foliage and flowers
Borage	<i>Borago officinalis</i>	Edible foliage and flowers
Bronze fennel	<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i>	Ornamental foliage
Catmint, catnip	<i>Nepeta</i> spp.	Attracts butterflies and hummingbirds
Chives	<i>Allium schoenoprasum</i>	Edible and textured foliage
Coriander / cilantro	<i>Coridandrum sativum</i>	Edible seeds (coriander) and foliage (cilantro)
Curry plant	<i>Helichrysum italicum</i>	Colored, aromatic foliage
Dill	<i>Anethum graveolens</i>	Attracts butterflies and hummingbirds; edible fruit (dill seed) and foliage (dill weed)
Fernleaf tansy	<i>Tanacetum vulgare</i>	Textured foliage
Scented geraniums	<i>Pelargonium</i> spp.	Aromatic foliage; not hardy in temperate climates
Lady's mantle	<i>Alchemilla</i> spp.	Textured foliage
Lamb's ears	<i>Stachys byzantina</i>	Textured foliage
Lavender	<i>Lavandula</i> spp.	Aromatic flowers
Lemon verbena	<i>Aloysia triphylla</i>	Aromatic foliage
Licorice plant	<i>Helichrysum petiolare</i>	Colored foliage
Marjoram	<i>Origanum majorana</i>	Attracts butterflies and hummingbirds; edible foliage
Mint	<i>Mentha</i> spp.	Edible, aromatic foliage
Oregano	<i>Origanum vulgare</i>	Attracts butterflies and hummingbirds; edible foliage
Parsley	<i>Petroselinum crispum</i>	Attracts butterflies and hummingbirds; edible foliage
Rosemary	<i>Rosmarinum officinalis</i>	Edible and aromatic foliage; over-winter indoors for best results
Common Sage	<i>Salvia officinalis</i>	Attracts butterflies and hummingbirds; aromatic and edible foliage
Scarlet Sage	<i>Salvia splendens</i>	Attracts butterflies and hummingbirds
Savory	<i>Satureja</i> spp.	Edible foliage
Sweet bay, bay leaf	<i>Laurus nobilis</i>	Edible foliage; over-winter indoors for best results
Sweet woodruff	<i>Galium odoratum</i>	Aromatic foliage
Tarragon	<i>Artemisia dracunculus</i>	Edible foliage
Thyme	<i>Thymus vulgaris</i>	Attracts butterflies and hummingbirds; edible foliage
Wormwood	<i>Artemisia absinthium</i>	Colored, textured foliage