



Herb Gardening

Herbs are some of the easiest plants to grow – after all, they are basically aromatic weeds that have lost none of their attractive and persistent *joie de vivre* after centuries of cultivation. They are an excellent entry to the art of gardening because all they need is a sunny spot, average soil and some regular clipping – they love being used! Choose the herbs you use regularly and plant them close to your kitchen. Herbs don't need a lot of room and can be planted somewhat densely. They vary in texture, height and habit and can be arranged for convenience or for aesthetics. You may choose to plant a traditional, designated herb garden, add annual herbs to your vegetable garden, or interplant perennial herbs in your flower beds. Many herbs will be happy in pots in a sunny window or balcony – look for the designation “Pot” in the chart. Remember to group plants with similar light and moisture needs if you are making a combo planter.

Selecting and Preparing Your Planting Site

- Choose a site that has a minimum of six hours of direct sun. Many herbs will be fine in partial shade (4-6 hours of sun) but will tend to be straggly, weak, and lacking in taste when grown in full shade (less than 4 hours of sun).
- Improve drainage by loosening the soil and adding *Dr. Earth Mother Land Compost* and *Turface* soil conditioner.
- Raised beds are a great solution to dealing with heavy clay soils and make it easier to add the amendments. Make the beds narrow enough so you can plant and harvest your herbs without stepping on the soil and causing compaction.
- Once your herb bed is established, keep building up the soil by annually top-dressing/mulching with compost which will protect the growing plants while it breaks down and enriches the soil. Other than that, herbs don't need extra fertilizer. In fact, over-fertilizing may reduce the level of essential oils which give the leaves their aroma and flavor.

Sowing and Planting Your Herbs

- Some herbs reach harvest size more quickly than others. The herb chart lists which herbs are best to **BUY** as a plant, which may be directly sown into the garden - **DS**, which should be sown indoors and transplanted outside - **In/Out**.
- After you've decided on a design layout, work from the center of the bed outwards, setting out your transplants first.
- Dig a shallow hole the same depth as the pot, but twice as wide. Gently loosen the herb's root ball and spread roots out in the hole. Keeping the crown at grade, backfill and firm down the soil. Water in with *Nature's Source 10-4-3*.
- Once all the transplants are in you can “mulch” the bed with compost. To direct sow your annual herbs, drill small holes in the nice loose compost, fill with vermiculite, and sow sparsely. Water gently and keep seedbed consistently moist until the seeds germinate.

Harvesting Tips

- Harvest often and you will have bushier and healthier plants. Clipping also delays annual herbs from bolting to flower.
- Essential oils are most intense in the morning – after the dew has dried but before the sun becomes too hot.
- Timing depends on which part you are harvesting. For best flavor, harvest leaves before herbs flower. Harvest flowers just before they open. Allow seeds to mature on plants, then carefully uproot and hang entire plant in a cool dry place.

Herb	Spacing/Type	Aspect	Comments
Basil <i>Ocimum basilicum</i>	4-8" Annual In/Out; Buy Plant	Full Sun	Moist, rich soil; loves hot weather; harvest regularly to keep from going to flower; many cultivars to choose from – taste test for your favorite
Borage <i>Borago officinalis</i>	12" Annual In/Out; DS; Buy Plant	Full Sun	Medium moist, loose soil; large plant; re-seeds readily; cucumber-flavored flowers used as garnishes and in salads; excellent bee plant
Bay <i>Laurus nobilis</i>	Tropical Buy Container Plant	Sun to Part Shade	Let soil dry almost completely before watering; readily grows into shrubby houseplant; do not bring outside until nights are consistently above 50°
Chives <i>Allium schoenoprasum</i>	2-8" Perennial DS; Buy Plant	Sun to Part Shade	Moist, loose soil; cut back to 3" when harvesting; edible flowers; Garlic Chives are also tasty but re-seed vigorously; both are excellent bee plants
Cilantro <i>Coriandrum sativum</i>	2-4" Annual DS; Buy Plant	Full Sun	Medium moist, loose soil; bolts to seed rapidly so harvest regularly; sow seeds at 2-week intervals for continual harvest or allow to freely reseed
Dill <i>Anethum graveolens</i>	2-4" Annual DS; Buy Plant	Full Sun	Medium moist, rich soil; sow somewhat densely for leaf, thin to 4" for seed production; hang upside down in a paper bag to dry and collect seeds
Fennel <i>Foeniculum vulgare</i>	4-6" Tender Perennial DS; Buy Plant	Full Sun	Medium moist, rich soil; grow non-bulbing type for leaf, thin to 6" for seed production; hang upside down in a paper bag to dry and collect seeds
Lavender <i>Lavandula spp.</i>	12-18" Tender Perennial Buy Container Plant	Full Sun	Somewhat dry, gravelly soil; challenging in St. Louis climate – consider keeping as a container plant; flowers used in cooking as well as for sachets
Lemon Balm <i>Melissa officinalis</i>	12" Perennial DS; Buy Plant	Sun to Part Shade	Moist, well-drained, medium rich soil; very vigorous; re-seeds readily and makes a great groundcover; best used fresh – a great iced tea
Lemon Verbena <i>Aloysia triphylla</i>	12-18" Tropical Buy Container Plant	Full Sun	Medium moist, well-drained, rich soil; best as an annual; gets large and woody but is challenging to over-winter in a pot; clear lemon taste
Lovage <i>Levisticum officinale</i>	18-24" Perennial In/Out; DS; Buy Plant	Sun to Part Shade	Moist, medium-rich soil; forms a tall plant for continuous harvest of leaves; excellent mild celery flavor for salads and soups
Marjoram <i>Origanum majorana</i>	6-8" Annual DS; Buy Plant	Full Sun	Drier, well-drained soil; very decorative, milder form of oregano – great in salads; use fresh but also dries well; essential cooking tool; good bee plant
Mint <i>Mentha spp.</i>	12-18" Perennial Buy Plant	Sun to Part Shade	Moist, well-drained, medium-rich soil; spreads by very vigorous runners; give mint its own bed or contain within the garden; many different types
Oregano <i>Origanum vulgare</i>	12" Perennial Buy Plant	Sun to Part Shade	Drier, well-drained soil; can grow quite large; cut back regularly to control size; essential cooking tool; easily dried or harvest during mild winter days
Parsley <i>Petroselinum spp.</i>	8-12" Biennial Direct Sow/Transplant	Sun to Part Shade	Moist, medium rich, loose soil; be patient, slow to germinate; do not crowd in the garden; harvest through winter then allow to reseed in spring
Rosemary <i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>	8-24" Tender Perennial Buy Container Plant	Full Sun	Drier, well-drained soil; 'Arp' is the hardy cultivar; cultivars have different habits but similar flavor; good choice for wintering inside in pots; dries well
Sage <i>Salvia officinalis</i>	12" Perennial In/Out; Buy Plant	Sun to Part Shade	Drier, well-drained soil; forms large, woody semi-shrub; trim regularly to keep well-branched, tidy and dense; all cultivars have similar flavor
Salad Burnet <i>Sanguisorba minor</i>	8-12" Perennial Buy Plant	Sun to Part Shade	Medium moist soil; decorative and tasty salad herb with mild cucumber flavor; somewhat evergreen – makes an easygoing edging plant
Summer Savory <i>Satureja hortensis</i>	8" Annual In/Out; Buy Plant	Full Sun	Drier, well-drained soil; makes a tall, lanky plant; peppery flavor is great with beans and in soup; use fresh but also dries well
Tarragon <i>Artemisia dracunculus</i>	8-12" Perennial Buy Plant	Sun to Part Shade	Well-drained, medium rich soil; tends to sprawl; sterile flowers – can't be grown by seed; makes <i>fines herbes</i> along with parsley, chives, and chervil
Thyme <i>Thymus spp.</i>	6-8" Perennial In/Out; Buy Plant	Sun to Part Shade	Drier, well-drained soil; low-growing and vigorous; essential cooking tool; easily dried or harvest during mild winter days; good bee plant
Winter Savory <i>Satureja montana</i>	8" Perennial In/Out; Buy Plant	Full Sun	Drier, well-drained soil; underused but very useful herb – more pungent than Summer Savory; easily dried or harvest during mild winter days