



Growing Herbs

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A Definition of Herb

- A plant or part of a plant valued for its medicinal, savory or aromatic qualities.
- When discussing herbs, the topic of spices naturally arises and the differences between the two are often questioned. For simplicity, we will use the definition that herbs are leaves, fresh or dried, while spices are generally made from seeds, roots, flowers, or bark.
- Our discussion will mostly be limited common herbs and to leaves, fresh or dried.



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Why Grow Herbs

- Health benefits
 - Culinary uses
 - Enhance the flavor of food
 - Reduce salt use
 - Aroma therapy
- Attractive plants in a mixed bed
- Some are fantastic for attracting pollinators
- Most are pest resistant because of essential oils in leaves



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Growing Herbs is Easy

- Full / part sun
- Tolerant of average soil
- Wide variety of cultivars available
- Can start from seed, cuttings or divisions
 - When starting seed follow instruction on back of packet
- Grow well in containers & the garden
- Great mixed in landscapes as ornamentals
- Some attract pollinators (good bugs)
- Bad bugs don't care for herbs



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Soil Test

- Do a soil test
- Soil pH from 6.2 to 6.8 is fine for herbs
- Some herbs, specifically those from the Mediterranean like well drained soil
- Don't over fertilize
 - Can cause excessive growth, dilute essential oils leading to less intense flavor
 - Compost added to soil is sufficient



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Annual Herbs

- Basil
- Chamomile
- Chervil
- Cilantro/Coriander
- Dill
- Summer Savory



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Basil

- Many varieties
 - Genovese (sweet), lemon, Thai, dark Opal
- Heat loving plant
 - Transplant after all danger of frost is past (June 1)
- Health Benefits
 - Contains Powerful Antioxidants
 - An Anti-inflammatory Herb
- Pruning
 - Pinch frequently above leaf nodes to keep plant bushy



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Coriander/Cilantro and Dill

- Direct sow in garden
- Both leaves and seed have culinary uses
- Cool weather plants
 - Go to seed rapidly in hot weather
 - Continuously sow seed throughout season
 - Self sows readily
- Attracts pollinators
 - Dill is a host plant for swallowtail
- Health Benefits
 - Dill is an excellent source of vitamin C and fiber
 - Cilantro lowers blood sugar and is an antioxidant



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Summer/Winter Savory

- Start seeds indoors/cutting
- Plant transplants outdoors after last frost
- Prefers higher pH soils
- Health Benefits

– Savory helps reduce gas, bloating, cramps

Savory is one of the most **pungent** herbs, with a hot, peppery flavor similar to thyme or marjoram. Savory is best used sparingly or in slow-cooked dishes with meat and vegetables. Also great with green beans.



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Biennial or Perennial Herbs

- Chives
- Fennel
- Lavender
- Mint
- Oregano
- Parsley
- Rosemary
- Sage
- Sorrel
- Tarragon
- Thyme



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Biennial or Perennial Herbs

- When grown from seed, varieties, if not specified will be common varieties
- If, like French tarragon, a specific variety is desired, transplants must be purchased
 - Many specific types of rosemary, thyme, mint and oregano can be purchased as transplants
 - I taste a purchased transplant to insure it's labeled correctly
- Plant after last frost



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Chives

- Onion and garlic flavor
- Cool weather plant blooming late spring
- Blossoms can be eaten, used as garnish or used to make chive (vinegar)
- Nutrient dense, vitamin C and calcium



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Fennel

- Cool weather plant if grown for bulb
- Anise flavor
- Frons and stems used in soups
- Attracts pollinators if allowed to flower
 - Host to swallowtail caterpillar
- Can self seed
- Good for bone and heart health, lowers blood pressure



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Lavender

- Mostly grown for aroma
- Can be used in baking and cocktails
- Munstead and Hidcote are culinary varieties whose blossoms are used to add a subtly sweet citrus flavor to dishes
- Useful for treating anxiety, insomnia, depression, and restlessness.
- Harvest deep purple buds (stems) prior to bloom, strip leaves and hang to dry



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Mint and Oregano

- Both of these herbs can be invasive
- Oregano
 - Greek, Italian, Mexican
 - Rich in antioxidants, anti-bacterial
- Mint
 - Peppermint, orange, chocolate, spearmint, etc.
 - Improves digestion, eliminates bad breath



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Parsley

- Curly leaf and Italian flat leaf
- Start from seed indoors or out
- Cool weather plant
- Host for swallowtail caterpillar
- Often labeled as one of the most powerful disease-fighting plants
- Rich in Vitamin C, A, K



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Rosemary

- Half hardy perennial in our area
- Many different varieties
 - All noted for piney sent
- Prefer well drained soil
- Stems and leaves can be dried
- If container grown, bring indoors in winter and water sparingly
- Good source of iron, calcium and vitamin B-6



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Sage

- Prune out dead wood in spring
- Some varieties have variegated leaves
- Benefits from well drained soil
- Can be mulched over the winter to improve survival
- Antioxidant, supports oral health and lowers blood sugar and bad cholesterol



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Sorrel

- Lemon flavored leaves
- Best favor in early spring
- Prefers well drained soil
- Widely considered a weed in the US
- Use young leaves in salads, larger leaves in soups, stews and sauces.
- Rich in vitamin C



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Tarragon (French)

- Anise flavored leaves
- Needs a cold dormant period
- Prefers well drained soil
- S/B purchased, seed is normally Russian variety
- Use a good champagne vinegar to make tarragon vinegar
- Lowers blood sugar and improves sleep



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Thyme

- Thrives in well drained soil
- Many varieties
 - English, lemon, caraway, orange balsam, etc.
 - Variegated
 - Prostrate or upright forms
 - Antibacterial, kidney health, wound treatment



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Insects and Disease

- Less susceptible possibly because of their fragrance and flavors
- Major insects:

Aphids



Whiteflies



Mites



Slugs



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Control of Diseases and Insects

- Healthy plants resist insect predation, stressed plants invite insect predation
- Mechanical control – preferred for light insect infestation
- Chemical control of insects:
 - Home Remedies - insecticidal soap, Neem oil, lemon or vinegar spray
 - Registered pesticides - Safer's Insecticidal Soap and EcoBlend Organic Insecticidal Soap



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References

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- <http://www.wvu.edu/~agexten/hortcult/herbs/ne208hrb.htm>
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