

Herb Gardening for Beginners



TIPS & TECHNIQUES

By Ellen Rose

Herb Gardening for Beginners: Tips & Techniques

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Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Cooking, Medicinal, and Growing Information by Herb](#)

[Allspice](#)

[Anise](#)

[Bay leaf](#)

[Celery](#)

[Cilantro](#)

[Dill](#)

[Fennel](#)

[Garlic](#)

[Ginger](#)

[Marjoram](#)

[Mint](#)

[Onion \(bulbs\)](#)

[Oregano](#)

[Parsley](#)

[Rosemary](#)

[Sage](#)

[Sweet Basil](#)

[Tarragon](#)

[Thyme](#)

Introduction

For beginners, the idea of starting a herb garden can be a bit daunting. In addition to dirt and grime, there is time involved, perspiration, and initial cost to contend with.

Offsetting these potential drawbacks are just as many reasons to start right away. A well-tended herb garden beautifies its surroundings, enveloping the air with a fresh and appealing aroma. Herbs grown are organic (e.g. no pesticides in your salad), less expensive than at the store, freshly available and filled with healing properties. A power-packed source of vitamins and minerals, fresh herbs taste better and have more nutritional value than their dried store bought counterparts.

The exercise involved in growing a herb garden is good for the body, and the revitalizing that comes from gardening is good for the soul. Many herb gardeners enjoy sharing fresh herbs with family and friends, while others find that gardening is just plain fun.

This handy little guide will give you even more reasons to start a herb garden. With pictures, helpful information on the cooking and medicinal benefits of herbs, and a 1-2-3 guide to growing each particular herb, it's packed with useful information designed to help you enjoy the revitalizing and refreshing pleasure of growing your own herbs.

Ellen Rose

Cooking, Medicinal, and Growing Information by Herb

Allspice



Cooking applications: Similar to cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves in flavor, Allspice can be used in both sweet and savory ways. It tastes great with beef, complements curry, and is extremely tasty in apple muffins or just about any recipe that contains apples. This herb can be very strong, so it's best to test smaller amounts until you get the desired flavor.

Medicinal qualities: Allspice is a popular ingredient in Mexican and Central American dishes. Ground allspice has a strong, spicy taste and a sweet, aromatic fragrance. Much like black peppercorns, allspice berries are often used to improve digestion. The herb's active ingredient contains anti-inflammatory and anti-flatulent properties, and the essential oils are effective as an antiseptic. Furthermore, allspice is a good source of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants like vitamins A and C.

Best Conditions for Growing Allspice

Preferred Soil: Loose and well-moistened soil with good drainage is best (clay does not work well.)

Sunlight requirements: Direct sunlight not required, can grow in areas with partial shade.

Temperature requirements: Grows best in areas where the temperature remains constant at about 26 degrees Celsius.

Tips for Growing

Soil Preparation: Fertilize the soil with tropical plant fertilizer mixed 30-10-10, and repeat the fertilization every 3-5 weeks.

Planting: Plant the tree where the requirements for soil, sunlight, and temperature (as listed above) can be met. If you are planting allspice trees outside, plant them at least 18 feet apart. The best time to plant is between spring and summer.

Watering: Keep the tree well-watered. Letting it dry out will negatively impact growth.

Harvesting: When the tree is fully grown (about 40 feet high) the berries may be harvested. The berries ripen in late summer, and when they do, they begin to lose their aroma. The best time to harvest the allspice berries is before the aroma is gone.

Anise



Cooking applications: With a flavor similar to licorice, Anise is a common ingredient in Scandinavian, East Indian, Moroccan, and Middle Eastern cuisine. It is also frequently used for flavoring liqueurs such as pastis and ouzo. In baked goods such as cakes and cookies, anise intensifies sweetness. Use it with cinnamon and bay leaf in pork and game dishes for a classic taste combination.

Medicinal qualities: Anise is a spicy plant that is native to Egypt and the Mediterranean region. The aromatic plant is characterized by small, umbrella shaped white flowers and brown seeds that look like commas. Anise seed is an exotic spice with many health benefits, including disease prevention. The herb contains high levels of antioxidant nutrients that remove harmful free radical elements. Traditional medicine used the herb for stomach aches, digestive problems, muscle spasm and other maladies.

Best Conditions for Growing Anise

Preferred Soil: Well-draining soil mixed with sand and organic compost

Sunlight requirements: Partial to full sunlight

Temperature requirements: Needs at least 120 frost-free days to grow successfully

Tips for Growing

Soil Preparation: Spread a 2-inch layer of sand and organic compost and work it into the soil.

Planting: Plant the anise seeds 2 weeks after the last predicted frost. Sow them 1/4-1/2 inches deep, spacing them 1-2 inches apart within rows and leaving 1-2 feet between rows.

Watering: Anise needs consistently moist soil to grow successfully, so regular watering is needed. If allowed to become too dry, anise plants turn brown and produce inferior seeds.

Pruning: Thin the seedlings after 6 weeks so that 8-12 inches remain between plants.

Harvesting: Anise seeds are ready for harvest about one month after the flowers bloom. Cut off the green seed heads and hang them in a warm, dry place until they mature. After the seed heads are dried, shake the seeds into a bowl. Remove the chaff and place the seeds in a Ziploc bag for storage.

Bay leaf



Cooking applications: With a flavor similar to (but more pungent) than oregano, bay leaves are a mildly flavored herb that is often used to flavor soups, stews, and braised meats. Bay leaves taste especially wonderful in bean soup. Just be sure to take out the bay leaf before serving, as the bay leaves themselves are bitter.

Medicinal qualities: Bay leaf or bay laurel is a pleasant, aromatic herb with many culinary and medicinal values. Originating in Asia Minor, bay laurel eventually spread throughout Asia and the Mediterranean region. The plant is known by its star-shaped flowers, leathery leaves and single, dark green berry. Bay leaf contains many vitamins, minerals and other compounds that promote health. The spice is said to have antiseptic, antioxidant and anti-cancer properties.

Best Conditions for Growing Bay Leaf

Preferred Soil: Requires healthy soil with good drainage.

Sunlight requirements: Direct sunlight is needed.

Temperature requirements: Bay leaf can thrive in any climate.

Tips for Growing

Soil Preparation: Although fertilizer may be applied, it isn't necessary.

Planting: Summer is the best time to plant bay leaf. Cut the stem for about 4-5 inches, then plant again.

Watering: Doesn't require much care.

Harvesting: Can be harvested a few years after planting. Bay leaves need to be dried, otherwise their flavor is bitter.

Celery



Cooking applications: Celery, with its umbellate flowers, is a relative of Queen Anne's lace and also bears some resemblance to poison hemlock. The seeds are used as seasoning, and both stalks and roots are popular vegetables. Classic flavor combinations are found in Creole cuisine's use of celery, onions, and bell peppers, and French cooking's celery, onion, and carrot mirepoix. Most savory dishes benefit from its use. Cut celery turns brown within a few hours of preparation, so be sure to chop or slice shortly before use if using raw.

Medicinal qualities: Most people think of celery as a vegetable, but it is actually a herb. The strong, fragrant qualities of celery flavor many Mediterranean dishes. Originating in Europe, celery is popular around the world as a container or kitchen garden plant. It is coveted for its shoots, roots, leaves and seeds. The low-calorie herb has many beneficial functions. It is a rich source of vitamin A, beta-carotene and other antioxidants. The vitamin K in celery promotes bone health, and the herb is also a cancer fighter and immunity booster.

Best Conditions for Growing Celery

Preferred Soil: Adequate draining system is required, as well as good air circulation.

Sunlight requirements: Direct sunlight is needed.

Temperature requirements: Ideally should be at least 70-75 F during the day, and not less than 60 F at night.

Tips for Growing

Planting: Plant at intervals of 6-8 inches between seeds: also leave 2-3 feet between rows.

Watering: Requires a plentiful supply of water, at least an inch per week.

Harvesting: When cutting the celery, do not reach the soil line.

Chives



Cooking applications: Because heat destroys their delicate onion flavor, chives should always be added into hot dishes at the last minute. To maximize their taste, slice the chives thinly. When finely snipped they also make a great garnish. Chives are good for flavoring cooked dishes or chopped fresh and put into salads. They taste especially good as a baked potato topping: they are also great in dips and in quesadillas. Toss chives into a dish at the last minute, because heat destroys their delicate onion flavor.

Medicinal qualities: Chives, which are onion-flavored top-greens of lily or allium family vegetables, feature hollow, tubular leaves similar to those of onion. Chives are thought to have originated in the mountains of Siberia. They are low-calorie fare that contain healthy, plant-derived fiber. Like other herbs, chives possess several antioxidants such as vitamins A and C. They are also rich in vitamin K, which is useful for blood vessel diseases and Alzheimer's disease.

Best Conditions for Growing

Preferred Soil: Chives grow in many different types of soil.

Sunlight Requirements: Chives prefer sunshine to shade. Although they grow well indoors, it's important to provide a source of light—sunshine from a sunny window or a grow light with a fluorescent bulb instead.

Temperature Requirements: If you want to grow chives outdoors, make sure that you live in zones 3 to 10. Anything outside of those zones will have a climate that is too cold or hot to successfully grow chives. Be prepared for your chives to die during the winter like other plants that originate from a bulb. Some chives that are grown in warm conditions may keep their green color year around, temporarily relapsing for a couple months before sprouting again.

Tips for Growing

There are two different types of chives that are popular with herbal enthusiasts. The regular leafy chives with cylindrical leaves that are hollow and the kind with flat leaves (also known as a garlic chive). The ‘garlic chives’ have beautiful white flowers that are edible and a flavor that is milder than the other kind. Both kinds of chives can be grown under identical environmental conditions.

Pots of chives can be used to decorate patios or porches. They look especially beautiful when placed side by side with containers with other herbs such as dill, sage, and parsley.

Planting: Buy chive seeds and plant them in small pots. They will sprout quickly and grow slowly thereafter. If you don’t have much time, buy the chives as small plants inside of pots. Put small plants or pot seedlings inside of a pot that is 5 inches wide or larger and fill it with regular potting soil. Nurture the plants along with fertilizer or bone meal regularly while they are still growing.

Watering: Water the plants enough so the soil stays moist but not too wet. When the chives aren’t sprouting—you can water them less frequently, but make sure that they don’t dry out.

Harvesting: Using a pair of sharp, clean scissors to cut the long green hollow leaves of the chives down close to the ground. Leave 5 inches (2 centimeters) of the plants to allow for regrowth. Also, its better if you don’t allow the plants to flower—your chives will have better flavor that way.

Cilantro



Cooking applications: Cilantro: One of the most pungent of herbs, cilantro refers to the leaves of the cilantro plant while coriander refers to the dried seeds. Some people find a bold, citrus flavor in cilantro. Others have compared it to metal or soap! With its blend of citrus and peppery flavor, coriander makes a great curry powder and tastes delicious in Cuban and Mexican cooking, as well as in salsas, curries, and tortilla soup. Cilantro is extremely good at balancing the sweet flavors of onion and tomato. Be careful not to overcook cilantro, as it can become bitter quite quickly.

Medicinal qualities: Cilantro, also called coriander, is a widely-used Mediterranean herb. It also flavors many Asian dishes. The savory herb has notable compounds that prevent disease and promote health. Cilantro is a cholesterol-free herb packed with vitamins, minerals, essential oils and dietary fiber. Traditional medicine used it as an analgesic, deodorant, digestive aid, weight loss aid, stimulant and aphrodisiac.

Best Conditions for Growing

Preferred Soil: Cilantro grows best in well-draining soil.

Sunlight Requirements: Cilantro, which really does not like too much light, grows best in shady places.

Temperature Requirements: Plant your cilantro where it will get lots of sunshine (unless you live in an extremely warm climate). In terms of timing, be sure to plant it when the weather has warmed up so there's no risk of frost.

Tips for Growing

Planting: Place the seeds in soapy water and rinse them thoroughly. Place them on a dry towel and let them dry. Once they are fully dried, plant the seeds in soil that drains easily. Plant the seeds one inch from each other about half an inch deep. Since cilantro isn't a short plant—place the rows at least a foot apart.

Watering: It's important not to over-water cilantro. If the soil is already damp, hold off and check again the next day.

Harvesting: Pick the cilantro leaves after the plant has grown 6 inches. Try to only cut the leaves that aren't right next to the central stalk. If you are planning to harvest the coriander seeds after the plant is fully grown, don't cut as many leaves and instead cut the heads of the flowers off the plant. Every two years, cut the stems off of the flowers when they are dead. Fasten the heads to each other and leave them hanging above a container so the plant's seeds will fall down inside and dry. If you don't cut the stalks off of the flower, the cilantro plant will reseed every 14 days.

Attempt an easier method if you would like to harvest as much cilantro leaf as possible. Buy a large planter and fill it with easily draining dirt. Moisten the soil and plant cilantro seeds evenly throughout the soil. After planting the seeds, stroke a light layer of dirt over them and a little liquid to soften the soil. Wait seven to ten days and the seeds will start to sprout. After the plant has grown up, you will be able to harvest it once a week.

Remove the leaves of the cilantro plants from one side of the plant, and the next time you harvest the plant, take leaves from a different area. Make sure to trim any flowers off the plant so it will expend more energy growing new cilantro leaves.

Dill



Cooking applications: A symbol of vitality since ancient times, dill has often been viewed as having magical powers. During the Middle Ages some people thought dill protected against the wiles of witches. As a result, dill was a major ingredient in numerous magic potions. In the kitchen, dill's dark feather leaves add a fresh, sharp flavor to foods ranging from cottage cheese to potato dishes, cucumber salads, and pickles.

Medicinal qualities: Dill weed is cultivated for the leaves and seeds. It is most popular as a seasoning. Like cilantro, dill is native to Mediterranean countries and Eastern Europe. As a spice, brown dill seeds resemble caraway seeds. Their flavor is savory and sweet, but slightly bitter. Dill weed compounds are known for their antioxidant and disease-fighting properties. The herb has therapeutic uses as an antiseptic and anesthetic. Dill also promotes metabolism and has sedative properties.

Best Conditions for Growing

Preferred Soil: Dill prefers rich, full-drained soil.

Sunlight Requirements: Pick a growing spot for the dill seeds that is exposed to sunshine at least 5 hours every day. Dill plants can grow indoors—but they will need to be placed where sunlight can reach them and staked so they don't topple over.

Temperature Requirements: Dill doesn't grow well in extremely warm temperatures—in northern climates, most gardeners plant dill as soon as the last frost comes.

Tips for Growing

Planting: Dig a small hole and plant the seeds half an inch into the soil sometime in the early spring after the last frost. Place a very thin layer of dirt over the seeds. Make sure to plant the seeds about 4 inches apart. Two weeks after planting the seeds, chop some of the dill plants down so that the ones left have 9 inches of separation.

Watering: Dill should be watered evenly and well.

Harvesting:. Pick the leaves when the plant is four to six weeks old. Let the plant continue to grow after harvesting it. Make sure to eat the leaves soon after picking them, since the flavor doesn't last long. Once flower heads have appeared on the dill plant, no more new leaves will grow. Wait for the flower heads to turn brown, and then harvest the seeds.

Fennel



Cooking applications: Fennel seeds and fronds are used as seasoning, and the stalk/bulb as a vegetable. The taste is similar to anise, but milder. Seeds are used in sweets, baked goods, and beverages; bulbs appear in salads and soups. Fennel pairs well with fish, beets, pickles, potatoes, and eggs. When using the leaves, be aware that heat destroys their flavor.

Medicinal qualities: Fennel seed is revered in Europe for its many health benefits. The sought-after spice is popular in Mediterranean cuisine. Fennel belongs to the parsley family, which also includes dill and anise. The plant is known for its golden flowers and light green seeds. The antioxidants in fennel seeds remove harmful free radicals from the body. This makes the herb useful for fighting infections, diseases and cancers. As a rich source of dietary fiber, fennel also aids digestion. Copper, zinc and other minerals make it beneficial for heart health and cell growth.

Best Conditions for Growing

Preferred Soil: Fennel grows best in rich, well-drained soil. The richer the soil is where the fennel is planted, the more tender its leaves will be. Apply mulch or fertilizer if the soil needs to be enriched.

Sunlight Requirements: Fennel requires full sun.

Temperature Requirements: Plant the fennel after the last frost for your climate zone. Fennel can survive a frost or two in the fall, so you won't need to rush to harvest if you live in a climate where things begin to get chilly.

Tips for Growing

Planting: Buy fennel seeds at a home and garden store or a nursery. If you're lacking time—purchase fennel that is already planted. Put the seeds a foot apart from each other and cover them with $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch of soil. If you are planting rows of fennel—separate the rows by 3 feet. If the fennel plants are planted in a windy area, make sure to stake them when they reach a foot and a half high. The fennel plants can grow as high as three to four feet. To protect the fennel plants during the winter, place four inches of mulch onto the dirt surrounding the plant. The mulch can be supplemented with hay, leaves, or evergreen boughs.

Watering: Spray the soil using a spray nozzle on a light setting. After one to two weeks shoots will begin to appear. Once the plants begin to grow they will only need to be watered a couple times a week—depending on how wet the climate is where you live.

Harvesting: Fennel leaves can be harvested as soon as the plants are growing well. Don't take too many leaves at a time, however, as that could damage the plant. Fennel bulbs should be harvested when they reach the size of a small tennis ball. Leaving them too long results in a bitter taste to the bulb.

Garlic



Cooking applications: Garlic has a strong onion-like flavor, muted by cooking, that enhances all foods except sweets and desserts. It figures prominently in Mediterranean cuisine. Store garlic bulbs at room temperature in a well-ventilated area. To prevent bitterness, remove any green inner sprout before chopping, and cook gently in oil only until a light gold.

Medicinal qualities: Throughout history, garlic has had countless culinary and medicinal uses. The herb is grown for its root or bulb, which contains important health-promoting nutrients. It has proven benefits for heart health, infections and cancer. Garlic is thought to have originated in central Asia before spreading around the world. The strong-flavored cloves are filled with vitamins, minerals and antioxidants. Garlic also has anti-bacterial, anti-fungal and anti-viral properties.

Best Conditions for Growing

Preferred Soil: Fertile soil that retains moisture but has good drainage, a mixture of sand, clay, and organic materials is best

Sunlight Requirements: plenty of full sunlight

Temperature Requirements: garlic is best planted in the fall—it can be grown in the North and can even withstand freezing temperatures as long as there aren't sudden drops

Tips for Growing

Planting: Purchase bulbs of garlic from a nursery during the cold months. Most places will not have already started seedlings available. Don't buy any garlic bulbs from the supermarket—they are usually treated to avoid sprouting. The cloves will need to be planted about 6 weeks before the ground freezes during the fall months. In mild climates place the cloves into the ground in January so you can harvest the garlic during the fall. While garlic can be planted in the spring, the bulbs will be smaller and fewer in number.

Choose a gardening spot that is fertile and has good drainage and retains moisture. Garlic grows the best in soil with a pH of 6.2 to 6.8, but it will grow in soil with a pH ranging from 5 to 8. Be careful not to plant garlic near onions, otherwise they might get a disease called “pink root”.

Make sure to pick a gardening spot that won't be disturbed since garlic takes two years to grow. You'll need to weed the spot well, since slow-growing garlic competes very poorly.

Plant only the cloves which are the largest, and throw out any cloves that are blue-green colored or pitted—these are moldy and won't grow.

Don't peel the cloves before planting them. Place them into the ground with the pointy end sticking straight up about two inches into the ground. Separate the cloves by five inches. If you are planting larger kinds of garlic, put them three inches down and separate them 10 inches from each other.

Cover the planted areas with mulch and compost to help keep the moisture in and weeds out. Mulch once again when the ground freezes completely to help keep the plants from getting too cold.

When springtime arrives, take the mulch off of the ground so the soil can be warmed up by the sunshine. Cut off any flowers that have developed to help the garlic plant grow bigger bulbs. Consider making “compost tea” and sprinkling it over the plants several times during spring.

Watering: Water the garlic plants with one inch of H₂O every week until the leaves turn a yellow color or the plant falls over—both of these are indicators that the bulbs can be harvested soon.

Harvesting: Remove the leaves of the garlic plant anytime you desire, but don't take off more than 25% of the top plant growth or the size of the garlic bulb will be less than it could have been. You can dig up the garlic bulbs three fourths of the top plant is yellow.

Ginger



Cooking applications: Long used as a remedy for indigestion, motion sickness and upset stomach, ginger hails originally from Asia. Its flavor resembles a mixture of citrus and cayenne, and can be quite hot. The root is used fresh, dried/powdered, or candied, and is common in Asian, African, and Caribbean cuisine. It pairs well with fruit, meats and poultry, winter squash, carrots, sweet potatoes, and baked sweets. The fresh root will keep for months if stored wrapped in a paper towel inside a sealed plastic bag.

Medicinal qualities: Ginger is a popular herb with many culinary and health benefits. The spicy root with knobby projections is used extensively in Asian and Indian cuisine. It is also used in Ayurvedic and traditional Chinese medicine. Since ancient times, ginger has been valued for its anti-inflammatory, anti-flatulent and anti-bacterial functions. The herb is often used to relieve pain, soothe nerves and reduce nausea. It also treats migraine headaches.

Best Conditions for Growing

Preferred Soil: Rich potting soil.

Sunlight Requirements: Keep out of direct sunlight.

Temperature Requirements: Make sure that plants are protected from high winds. Place the plants indoors as soon as the weather takes a turn for the worst. Move the plant's container outdoors when temperatures average around fifty degrees Fahrenheit. If the plants are placed outside in cold weather—growth can be slowed.

Tips for Growing

Planting: Purchase newly grown ginger roots from a Asian market or local grocery store. Try to pick fat tubers with many buds on them. Springtime is the ideal time to plant ginger because the plants prefer warm temperatures. The tubers will begin to grow when daytime highs hit 75 degrees Fahrenheit.

Put three tubers into a container that is about 1 foot across and 1 foot deep. Make sure the container has excellent drainage. Place enriched potting soil into the container. Mix the soil with compost.

Place the tubers in a tub of warm water so they can soak. After laying in the water for at least 12 hours, put them into the container just under the dirt. Lay the tubers down with the buds facing up while spacing them evenly between each other.

Place the container in a shady area with mild sunshine. If you live in a hot climate, avoid putting the tubers in direct sunshine.

Watering: Sprinkle water onto the plants lightly at first, and then more once the plants start growing.

Harvesting:. If everything goes as planned—the plants should reach a full growth of 2 to 4 feet in about a year or a little less. When new sprouts pop up, dig them out and freeze or eat them, and replant the rest. The new sprouts will show up directly in front of the older plants.

Marjoram



Cooking applications: Marjoram is a common ingredient in French, Portuguese, and Italian cuisine. Good with meats, potatoes, tomatoes, and in herb seasoning blends, it blends well with thyme, bay leaf, onion, and garlic. Use it as a passable substitute for oregano in most recipes.

Medicinal qualities: The aromatic leaves of marjoram result in several health benefits to the user. Marjoram hot teas help to stimulate and heat the body during chilly weather. Individuals with edema can use this herb as a diuretic to assist in eliminating excess water from body tissues. In addition, essential oils made from marjoram herb have antibacterial properties making it appropriate for use on scratches, scrapes and cuts.

Best Conditions for Growing

Preferred Soil: Marjoram grows best in a light, alkaline, lime-rich soil.

Sunlight Requirements: Grows well in full sunlight.

Temperature Requirements: If you live in a cooler temperate zone—don't leave the plants outside because marjoram can easily be killed by cold weather.

Tips for Growing

Planting: Buy a couple blocks of oasis foam and start by pushing the marjoram seeds into the foam. The seeds will be safely held inside of the foam and will give them a safe environment to grow in. The seeds are small and delicate, so they are not recommended for growing outside.

Place the seeds into small garden containers on a window sill or somewhere else where they can get lots of sunlight. Wait a about a week for the seeds to start growing. The root systems of the marjoram plant will be large enough to transplant elsewhere in about 3 weeks.

Before transplanting marjoram—place equal amounts of sand and loam potting soil into the pots. While marjoram doesn't require a lot of water to grow, make sure that the soil can drain well.

Break the oasis blocks into pieces so the roots are showing and place about an inch of soil in each of the marjoram gardening pots. Make sure the pots are large enough—marjoram's roots travel a long ways while staying close to the soil surface.

Don't use fertilizers because marjoram doesn't need them—it doesn't need much nutrition. The biggest risks are fungal infections and mites. These risks can be guarded against by rubbing the perimeter around the plants with fungicide and insecticide.

Watering: Sprinkle a small amount of water over the plants daily. Make sure to keep them in an area that receives lots of sunlight.

Harvesting: The herbs should be old enough to pick after they are six weeks old—whenever they reach 3 inches in height. If the plants are picked before the flowers open up, the marjoram will taste better.

Mint



Cooking applications: An extremely versatile herb, mint can do so much more than garnish dessert plates. Mediterranean cuisine often features mint as a companion to lamb. It is also often added to peas, carrots, fruit and vegetable salads, ice cream, mint juleps, and mojitos. Although there are many varieties of mint, spearmint, with its bright green, fuzzy leaves, is most often preferred for cooking. In contrast, peppermint (most famously used in candy) features darker stemmed, rounded leaves.

Medicinal qualities: The herb mint has an aromatic fragrance that is popular in aromatherapy products including candles, massage oils, room deodorizers, lotions and shampoos. Professional aestheticians often turn to mint-scented essential oils to help clients relax during massages. Mint oil is also known to repel many insects such as cockroaches, ants and wasps. Hot mint herbal tea is helpful for alleviating the discomfort of an upset stomach. Mint extracts are also a common ingredient in toothpastes to help whiten dental enamel.

Best Conditions for Growing

Preferred Soil: Moderately rich, well-drained soil.

Sunlight Requirements: Lots of sunshine preferred.

Temperature Requirements: 72-75° Fahrenheit (22-25° Celsius) is ideal.

Tips for Growing

Planting: Find a gardening spot where mint can freely grow without bothering other garden plants. Search for a place that is partially shaded and has moist, rich dirt for the mint plants to grow in. While these are the ideal conditions, mint plants don't mind full sunshine and sandy soil.

Purchase mint plants to plant during early springtime, as soon as the ground unfreezes. Do not try to grow mint from seeds—it is very difficult.

Put the plants about a foot to a foot and a half apart from each other. Different types of mint plants need more spacing, so make sure to read the directions. To make sure the plants don't overrun everything, place them inside of bottomless containers and sink the containers into the ground. Clay drainage tiles will work well for planting mint plants.

Break the stem ends off the plants every spring to help keep them bushy. When gardening season is over—prune the plants almost completely and cover them with compost.

Watering: Water the soil around the plants enough to keep the ground moist until the mint plants have started to grow.

Harvesting: While the plants are growing, harvest sprigs whenever you need to.

Onion (bulbs)



Cooking applications: The humble onion's traditional use in fighting infections and respiratory illness might be behind its reputed use by Alexander the Great to give his troops strength for battle. The bulb is used fresh and dried/powdered, and serves as both vegetable and flavoring agent. It goes well in virtually any savory dish, and is used raw or cooked. To avoid shedding tears when chopping onions, store them in the refrigerator and chop when cold. Onion powder, flakes, and salt can be bitter, so it is best to use fresh onions, which are available year-round in most locations.

Medicinal qualities: A pungent plant, onion offers nutritional benefits such as flavonoids and phenolics that fight against cancer, inflammation and infection. The juice from an onion bulb can be applied to the surface of the skin to repel biting insects. Onion gel extract offers antibacterial properties to prevent infections and scarring of skin tissue. Consumption of onion assists in lowering cholesterol levels, reducing edema and eliminating toxins from the body.

Best Conditions for Growing

Preferred Soil: While onions can be grown on all types of soil, the sandy or silt loams and muck soils, where available, are preferred

Sunlight Requirements: although onions can grow in shadier places, warm sunny days will speed the growing process

Temperature Requirements: because onions can tolerate light frosts, they can be planted when the daytime temperature is around 50°

Tips for Growing

Planting: Place a pound of compost onto rich soil that will hold the water it receives. Rake rows that are about ten inches apart.

In each row dig holes that are half an inch deep and four inches apart. Put a bulb into each hole and cover it with dirt. The best time to plant the bulbs is in early spring or fall.

Every 3 to 4 weeks, add compost or fertilizer to the ground around the newly planted onion bulbs. Weed the ground once a week.

Watering: Make sure that the ground is watered enough to keep the soil moist.

Harvesting: Once the tops fall off and die, it is time to harvest the onions. The onions will need to be dried before they can be stored, so they can last longer. Dry them by removing the root and the top of the onion.

Oregano



Cooking applications: Known as “joy of the mountain” in the Greek language, oregano grows wild in the mountains of that country and Italy. While the Greeks loved to sprinkle the flavorful herb on salads, the Italians showered it on pizza or slipped it into tomato sauce. Oregano adds excellent flavor to a vinaigrette: it also pairs well with poultry, wild game, and seafood dishes. Because of its similarity in looks and flavor to marjoram, it is often confused with that herb. The taste of oregano is much more potent and aromatic than that of marjoram (which is known for its sweeter and more delicate taste).

Medicinal qualities: The herb oregano has an intense flavor when it is dried for use in beverages and essential oils. The cooled tea or essential oils offer antiseptic health benefits for soothing sore throats, upper respiratory infections and upset stomachs. Recent studies by medical researchers have shown that food-borne illnesses improve after consuming oregano tea. In addition, oregano tea has beneficial qualities that assist in eliminating dangerous parasites from the digestive tract.

Best Conditions for Growing

Preferred Soil: Almost any well-drained garden spot.

Sunlight Requirements: Oregano likes sunshine, but can also be successfully grown in partial shade.

Temperature Requirements: Soil temperature must be kept higher than 45° for germination to take place.

Tips for Growing

Planting: Decide how your plants will be started—from nursery plants or seed (growing from seed is less expensive and simple, so you may want to try that first.) If you do purchase nursery plants, purchase good stock that doesn't have yellowing leaves or leaves damaged by insects.

Plant the oregano seeds $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch deep into the soil and a foot apart. The plants will eventually cover an area of 20 inches, so make sure to plan for their growth. Nursery plants should be inserted 18 inches apart from each other.

Watering: Requires moderate amounts of water.

Harvesting: The oregano will be ready for harvest during the middle of the spring. Harvest the leaves just before the flowers open. Remove six inches from the stem as well. After harvesting the leaves, wash them thoroughly in preparation for your meal.

When winter comes, cover the oregano plant with hay or leaves to help protect the plant from cold temperatures. Don't forget to remove the ground cover in the early springtime before the oregano plants start growing again.

Help the oregano plants to spread even further by dividing them in the middle of spring. This is right before the flowers grow—a period of peak growth.

Parsley



Cooking applications: The workhorse of the herb world, parsley can be added to a myriad of recipes. Known for its mild, grassy flavor, parsley complements other herbs by letting their flavors shine through. Because it is more flavorful and stands up better to heat, flat-leaf or Italian parsley is generally preferred for cooking. Curly parsley, which is used mostly for garnishing, is more valued for its decorative abilities. Either type of parsley works well when a dish needs a burst of color. As a flavoring, parsley pairs well with fish, chicken, vegetables, and roasted lamb.

Medicinal qualities: Parsley offers nutritional health benefits from several nutrients including vitamins A, C, folic acid and luteolin. This herb contains high levels of chlorophyll that has antibacterial properties. Parsley is often used to destroy bacteria that cause breath odor. Herbal teas made from the parsley herb help strengthen the immune system to assist in avoiding colds, bronchitis and influenza. In addition, parsley has tumor and inflammation fighting chemicals.

Best Conditions for Growing

Preferred Soil: Alkaline soil that doesn't hold water.

Sunlight Requirements: Doesn't require full sun (can live in partial shade).
Windowsills are great.

Temperature Requirements:

Tips for Growing

Planting: Parsley may be planted any time between early spring and fall. To decrease germination time, soak the seeds in warm water the day before planting. Put the small seeds on the soil, not in it. Make sure they stay moist until they germinate—2 to 3 weeks. At that point you will need to thin them to 3 inches apart. In most areas you will need to replant every year; however, in warmer climates it is a biennial.

Watering: Parsley must be watered thoroughly at least once every week, and must stay moist between those waterings as well. To help with moisture and weed control, you may wish to use light mulch.

At one point during the growing season, fertilize the parsley with a general purpose fertilizer. If you are growing it indoors, it is best to fertilize it every six weeks.

Harvesting: To harvest parsley, clip the stalks near the base. Start with the bigger stalks, as this will encourage new growth throughout the season. Just pinching the leaves off will cause less growth. Preserve parsley by either drying or freezing the leaves. Of the two types of parsley, Italian and Moss Curled, Moss Curled is more often used for garnishes, despite its slightly bitter taste.

Rosemary



Cooking applications: Known as “dew of the sea” in Latin, rosemary is one of the most aromatic and powerful of herbs. Originating near the Mediterranean, rosemary features needlelike leaves and a pronounced lemon-pine flavor that wonderfully complements focaccia, garlic, pizza, roasted lamb, tomato sauce, garlic, and olive oil. Caution is needed when adding rosemary to recipes, due to its strong flavor.

Medicinal qualities: The herb rosemary has several health benefits including improving memory functions. Individuals who have gout or arthritis can rub balm that contains rosemary on painful joints for relief. Rosemary contains several nutrients including vitamin B, calcium and iron to help individuals have improved physical health. Additional health benefits of the rosemary herb include help avoiding eye cataracts, kidney disease and heart conditions. Individuals can create a hot beverage from rosemary to assist with the discomfort of nausea or menstrual cramps.

Best Conditions for Growing

Preferred Soil: Make sure the soil drains well—raised beds work the best. Rosemary grows best in soil that has a pH of 6.5 to 7 and is considered poor to average.

Sunlight Requirements: Pick a gardening plot that receives lots of sunshine and small amounts of shade for the best results.

Temperature Requirements: Can be grown in the ground year-round, even in frost areas.

Tips for Growing

Planting: Purchase Rosemary plants that have already started growing from a nursery. Avoid buying seeds—they grow very slowly and are difficult to nurture.

If you live in a cold climate, place the Rosemary plant inside of a clay pot with drainage holes in the bottom. Make sure the pot is at least a square foot in size.

Plant the Rosemary plants as soon as the ground thaws. Set the transplants into the ground at the exact same height as they were growing in their nursery pots. Leave two feet of space remaining around the plants so they have room to grow.

Don't plant Rosemary and plan to move it later—it doesn't do well when transplanted.

Watering: Water the plants often, but make sure the soil doesn't get too wet. Make compost tea to help the plants grow better if they need the extra nutritional boost.

Harvesting: Cut the leaves and sprigs off anytime you need them for cooking. Even if Rosemary isn't your favorite garden herb, consider growing it to help keep garden pests away. The plant naturally repels bean beetles and cabbage moths.

Sage



Cooking applications: A native to the Mediterranean coast, sage features long, narrow leaves with a fuzzy texture and flavor that reminds of cedar, eucalyptus, lemon and mint—all at once. While Italians love sage with their veal, the French add it to cured meats, sausages, and stuffing dishes. In the United States, cooks are most likely to add sage to turkey and dressing. Caution is in order, as too much sage can overpower a dish.

Medicinal qualities: Sage has a strong distinct flavor and fragrance that creates an intense essential oil. Sage leaf extract is used to reduce high levels of lipids in the blood that cause increased incidences of cardiovascular disease. Researchers have discovered that sage extract can help manage Alzheimer's disease. In addition, sage oil can reduce symptoms of muscle spasms, bacterial infections, excessive perspiration, fungal conditions and menopausal discomfort. Sage tea also offers anti-inflammatory properties to stop the pain of arthritis.

Best Conditions for Growing

Preferred Soil: Find some rich potting soil and use it to fill a six inch tall pot. Moisturize the soil by adding a quart of water and letting the liquid drain through.

Sunlight Requirements: Place the sage pot in an open area that doesn't receive direct sunlight. Too much sunshine can completely dry out the potting soil.

Temperature Requirements: Ideal planting temperature would be 60-70° Fahrenheit.

Tips for Growing

Planting: Place a dozen seeds on top of the rich potting soil. Spread them evenly apart. Be careful not to add more seeds than you intended—this is easy to do since they are so small.

Sprinkle a very light layer of dirt over the seed, just barely covering it.

Use a covering of plastic food wrap to help keep moisture and warmth inside of the pot. The extra heat will allow the seeds to germinate extra fast.

When the seedlings are one inch tall, remove the plastic covering. Carefully remove the plants and transplant them in a sunny area that drains well. Give the plants two inches of space between each other.

Watering: Check the soil in the sage pot once a week to make sure the soil is keeping moist. If the dirt in the pot feels too dry, add a cup of water. Continue keeping the pot covered with the food wrap.

Harvesting: Pick the leaves as desired about 75 days after transplanting into your garden. Don't cut back more than half the plant or it will stop growing.

Sweet Basil



Cooking applications: One of the most important culinary herbs, sweet basil is used in pesto, sauces, sandwiches, salads, and soups. The slightly sweet but bold flavor (with a hint of a peppery or even minty bite) complements tomato-based recipes particularly well, making it a favorite in Italian dishes such as pizza and lasagna. Used extensively in Mediterranean and Asian cooking, it also compliments mild cheeses, peppers, and potatoes. Pasta with a little butter mixed in also tastes excellent accompanied by Sweet Basil.

Medicinal qualities: Sweet Basil assists in repelling insects such as mosquitoes so that individuals can avoid bites. Additional health benefits of the essential oil from the sweet basil plant include treating asthma, diabetes and stress related illnesses. The antiseptic qualities of basil oil can assist with destroying the bacteria in acne, cuts or wounds. Sweet basil essential oil has an aromatic fragrance that is enjoyable during massage treatments. In addition, the flavonoids in this herb can help individuals to avoid developing cancer.

Best Conditions for Growing

Preferred Soil: Well-drained soil, enriched with compost

Sunlight Requirements: Direct sunshine

Temperature Requirements: Prefers temperatures of 75-85° Fahrenheit for germination, and hot weather for growth.

Tips for Growing

Planting: Fill a planting pot with light soil about 2 inches from the rim. Do not pack the soil. Place your index finger into the soil and poke a small hole about a half an inch deep.

Put three to five seeds into the hole and cover them up with dirt. Remember not to pack the soil tightly.

Place the pot near a window so the seedlings will receive direct sunshine. After about a week seedlings should start to sprout.

Once the seedlings grow two pairs of leaves, thin them by keeping only the plants that look the hardiest and removing the rest.

Pick a garden spot to transplant the seedlings to. Make sure the soil drains well, and mix compost into it before transplanting.

Shortly after the last frost, transplant the basil plants to your garden spot. Be careful when replanting so the plant's roots are not hurt in any way.

Pour out a nutritious plant food on the basil plants once every month to make sure the basil plants receive all the nutrition needed to grow strong and healthy.

If any flowers appear, pinch them off. This will help ensure that the plants expends its energy to producing better and tastier leaves.

Watering: Pour a small amount of water on the base of the basil plant regularly. Do not give the plants too much water.

Harvesting: When harvesting leaves, take a few leaves from each plant instead of many from one. Also make sure to pick your leaves off of the top of the plant to help promote better growth of the leaves.

Tarragon



Cooking applications: Often added to white wine vinegar by the French, tarragon features a sweet, delicate licorice-like aroma and flavor. Cooks like to pair it with chicken, omelets, and fish. Fresh tarragon, with its bittersweet, peppery taste, is particularly delicious. Heat diminishes the flavor of this delightful herb, so add it at the end of the cooking process, or use it as garnish. Begin by adding just a little, as just a touch can go a long way.

Medicinal qualities: The delicious herb tarragon has numerous medicinal uses. As a hot tea, it is used to detoxify organs of the body such as the kidneys and liver while calming nervousness. In addition, tarragon is used as a herbal remedy to improve symptoms of nausea, hiccups, menstrual cramps, arthritic pain, toothaches, urinary infections and intestinal gas. Individuals with eating disorders can stimulate the appetite by drinking tarragon tea.

Best Conditions for Growing

Preferred Soil: Prefers well-drained soil which isn't too high in nutrients.

Sunlight Requirements: Prefers full sun, but can also grow in shaded areas.

Temperature Requirements: A hardy plant that can survive freezing or close to freezing temperatures.

Tips for Growing

Planting: Find a small planting pot that is 2 to 4 inches wide and fill it with rich, fertile soil.

Remove a stem from the tarragon plant about 4 to 6 inches long just below where the leaves have begun to grow.

Use your fingers to pinch leaves off of the bottom third of the stem.

Take the freshly cut stem and dip it into rooting hormone. The hormone can be grown or purchased at gardening stores.

Make a small hole with your finger about 1 inch deep in the planting pot.

Take a roll of plastic wrap and use it to cover the pot holding the tarragon. Make sure the wrap isn't touching any leaves. Poke a small hole in the wrap to allow for air circulation.

Place the pot in a location with lots of sunshine.

After 4 weeks of growth, take the plant out of the container and transplant it to a large gardening pot or a sunny gardening spot.

Watering: Spray the plants with small amounts of water. Check the plants regularly for condensation—it can lead to bacterial growth on the leaves.

Harvesting: Snip off the leaves you want, grows best when harvested regularly.

Thyme



Cooking applications: One of the most important herbs in the European kitchen, thyme complements many other herbs, including oregano, parsley, rosemary, sage, and savory. Its earthy flavor is especially appreciated in Cajun cooking, Creole recipes, and Caribbean jerk seasonings: it is also frequently added to duck, lamb, or goose. With leaves so small that chopping is not required, thyme is easy to prepare. Although dozens of varieties of thyme exist, French thyme is preferred by most cooks.

Medicinal qualities: The herb thyme is used to make an essential oil that offers several health or medicinal benefits including destroying fungus in toenails. With its antiseptic properties and great-tasting flavor, oil of thyme is perfect as a mouthwash ingredient. An additional use for thyme oil is preventing infection on wounds and cuts. Steeping this herbal plant in boiling water creates a tea that individuals can drink to assist with eliminating the symptoms of bronchitis or coughs.

Best Conditions for Growing

Preferred Soil: Dry soil that drains well with a pH of 6-8

Sunlight Requirements: Lots of sunshine

Temperature Requirements: Germinates best at 60-70° Fahrenheit, grows well in cool weather.

Tips for Growing

Planting: Purchase small plants from an herb nursery. Don't try to plant from seed—they grow very slowly and erratically.

Wait till springtime, then find a gardening spot with lots of sunshine that drains well. Dry soil is preferable—if it has a pH of 6 to 8 then the ground will be perfect for growing thyme.

Space the plants six to twelve inches from each other. Some varieties will need more distance, so make sure to read the labels on the packages.

Once the plants start growing flower heads, trim the flowers off to help promote leaf growth.

When wintertime comes, cover the area around the plants with a thick mulch cover.

To help keep the plants dense and healthy, divide them once every three or four years.

Watering: Below average water requirements for a herb.

Harvesting: Pick as needed (if planning to dry, pick when the plants begin to bloom). Cut off the tops with 4-5 inches of flowering stems.

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Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Cooking, Medicinal, and Growing Information by Herb](#)

[Allspice](#)

[Anise](#)

[Bay leaf](#)

[Celery](#)

[Cilantro](#)

[Dill](#)

[Fennel](#)

[Garlic](#)

[Ginger](#)

[Marjoram](#)

[Mint](#)

[Onion \(bulbs\)](#)

[Oregano](#)

[Parsley](#)

[Rosemary](#)

[Sage](#)

[Sweet Basil](#)

[Tarragon](#)

[Thyme](#)