

GROWING HERBS

Location. Select a sunny, well drained location. Apply a balanced fertilizer but avoid excessive use of nitrogen fertilizers.

Watering. Water as necessary during dry periods. Generally, you will need about 1 inch of water per week, if not supplied by natural rainfall. A mulch will help conserve soil moisture and reduce weed growth as well. The mints prefer moist soil, so they will require more frequent watering.

STARTING THE GARDEN

Annual and biennial herbs. These can be established by planting the seed directly in the garden or starting seeds indoors for later transplanting to the garden. You can save seed produced by the herb plants for next year's crop or obtain seed from your local garden center or seed catalog.

To save your own seed, harvest the entire seed head after it has dried on the plant. The seeds should then be allowed to dry in a protected location that is cool and dry. After the seeds are thoroughly dry, thresh the seed from the seed heads and discard the trash. Store in labeled jars in a dark, cool, dry location.

Perennial herbs. These can be propagated by cuttings or by division. Divide plants every 3 or 4 years in the early spring. The plants should be dug up and cut into several sections. You can also cut 4-6" sections of the stem and root them by placing the cuttings in moist sand in a shady area. In 4-8 weeks, roots should form. Herbs such as *sage*, *winter savory*, and *thyme* can be propagated by division of the roots or crowns. Apple mint forms runners or stems that run along the ground so it can be easily propagated by covering a portion of the runner and allowing it to form roots.

Harvesting. Leaves of many herbs such as *parsley* and *chives* can be harvested for fresh seasonings. With these plants you can gradually remove some of the leaves as you need them. Don't remove all the foliage at one time. These plants will produce over a long period of time if they are well cared for.

For rosemary and thyme, clip the tops when the plants are in full bloom. Usually leaves and flowers are harvested together.

Basil, fennel, mint, sage, summer savory, sweet marjoram, tarragon, and winter savory are harvested just before the plant starts to bloom.

Chervil and parsley leaves can be cut and dried anytime.

Lovage leaves should be harvested early during the first flush of growth.

Drying. After harvesting, hang the herbs in loosely tied bundles in a well-ventilated room. You can also spread the branches on a screen, cheesecloth, or hardware cloth. For herbs where leaves only are needed, the leaves can be spread on flat trays. Keep dust off the herbs with a cloth or similar protective cover that will allow moisture to pass through.

It is generally best to dry herbs naturally in a cool, dark room rather than use artificial heat. Artificial heat can cause many herbs to lose flavor or decline in quality.

Storage. When the herbs are thoroughly dry, they should be sealed in airtight containers such as sealed fruit jars and stored in a cool, dark location. Any sign of moisture accumulating in the jars indicates the herbs are not thoroughly dry.

Potted Herbs. Some herbs can be placed in pots and grown indoors during the winter months. They should be placed in a sunny south window and receive care similar to houseplants. Herbs can either be dug up toward the end of the growing season and placed in pots or started from seed indoors.

Basil, chives, mint, parsley, sweet marjoram, and rosemary are best adapted to pot culture.



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