

How to Grow



HERBS

Capital Nursery



What are herbs? A very general definition would be 'useful plants.' The leaves, roots, flowers and seeds are used to provide flavors to spice up food, medicine, perfumes, cosmetics, teas and dyes. More specifically, today we think of herbs primarily in the culinary sense, although, some are used for fragrance. California living and the cuisine that developed along with it, make the use of fresh herbs almost mandatory. Cooks soon realized they could easily grow 95% of the herbs they were buying in little bottles and also save money. They also found they could create custom herb blends, sauce, and soup mixes and salad dressings without excess salt, sugar or chemical additives — just the natural flavor of the herbs.

Where to plant: Locations for growing herbs are as varied as their flavors. Some adapt to cool and damp locations (mint) while others need a sunny hillside (rosemary). Growing conditions for specific varieties can be found using references such as, "The World of Herbs and Spices" by Ortho Books, "Herb Plants" from Hasenpfeffer Farms, or "Growing Herbs For Seasoning Food" from the U.C. Cooperative Extension office. Herb plants can be grouped in a kitchen garden or spread throughout your landscaping. Many herbs have foliage or flowers that make them a decorative as well as a delicious part of your garden. Most can also be grown in containers.

Preparing soil: Even though many herb plants can exist in poor soil, the quality and flavor will be greatly improved if they are grown in conditioned soil. They are intolerant of poorly drained soil. If you have heavy soil, results will be better if herbs are grown in raised beds. Mix 20% 'Paydirt' or 'Gold Rush Firbark Mulch' with existing soil in beds. If pots and planters are used, MasterNursery potting soil is an excellent premixed planting medium and is available in several sizes.

Watering: The basic rule for watering herbs is to water deeply and infrequently. Allowing plants to become completely dry stops growth but so does constant moisture. Drip irrigation systems or soaker hoses work well for watering herbs. Drip systems can be easily adapted to water herbs in pots. Soak plants thoroughly and then allow them to become almost dry before watering again.

Fertilizing: Many herb garden failures are the result of poor plant nutrition. Rapidly growing plants quickly deplete nutrients in the soil and if the plants grow too rapidly you will have nothing to harvest. Herbs are divided into two groups that require different diets. Leaf crops (where the primary goal is leaves) should be fertilized with a plant food high in nitrogen. A good example would be Master Nursery Mastergreen (25-6-4). Root or seed crops (where the, primary goal is root and seed production) should be given a food high in phosphorus and potassium. Master Nursery Tomato and vegetable food (5-10-10) would be ideal.

Pests & Diseases: Herbs as a group are amazingly free of pests. High oil content and pungent aromas seem to repel most insects and diseases in healthy plants. Aphid and whitefly are the two major pests and they can be quickly and safely controlled with Master Nursery Oil Spray (an organic product). It can be used up to the day of harvest on all crops. Snails are fond of some herbs. To solve this problem, ask for a copy of our sheet on "How to grow escargot." For the non-gourmet, Pestfighter Meal will control snails, slugs, earwigs and cut-worms.

Harvesting: Herbs always taste best if used fresh. A pair of scissors or grass shears are handy for snipping off just the amount you need for spicing up tonight's dinner. Take a colander out in the garden and pick and rinse your herbs right there. Most herbs respond well to regular picking as long as no more than 40% of the total plant is picked at one time.

Seasonal herbs such as basil, chives, dill or parsley may be dried or frozen for use during the "off" season. To freeze, simply remove leaves from large stems, place in a well labeled plastic bag and freeze. Frozen herbs retain texture and flavor almost indefinitely but are best if used within 2 years time.

Traditionally, herbs are dried by tying them in small bunches and hanging them in a place that is warm and dry but out of direct sunlight. They should be dry in 7-10 days and then stored as whole as possible in airtight containers away from heat. Herbs also can be dried in less than an hour by spreading them on cheese cloth covered racks in an oven on the lowest setting. Leave the oven door open and stir until dry.

VARIETIES: Almost all varieties on this list are available throughout the year. 'P' indicates the variety is available as plants, 'S' indicates seeds are available.

Amaranth	S/P		Marjoram	S/P
Basil, Italian	S/P		Mint, Egyptian	P
lemon	S/P		English	P
sweet	S/P		licorice	S/P
Bay, Grecian	P		lemon	S/P
Belgian endive	S		orange bergamont	P
Borage	S/P		pennyroyal	P
Catnip	S/P		peppermint	S/P
Cayenne	S/P		pineapple	P
Chamomile	S/P		spearmint	S/P
Chervil	S/P		Oregano	S/P
Chives, regular	S/P		Parsley, curled	S/P
Chives, garlic	S/P		Italian	S/P
Comfrey	S/P		Rosemary	S/P
Coriander	P		Radicchio	S
Cilantro	S		Roquette	S
Cress, garden		S	Sage, common	S/P
water	S		golden	P
winter	S		Mexican	S
Cumin	S		pineapple	P
Dill	S/P		Savory, summer	S/P
Fennel	S/P		winter	S/P
Garlic	S/P		Sesame	S
Hops	S/P		Sorrel	P
Horehound	S		Tarragon, French	P
Lavender	S/P		winter	S/P
Loveage	S/P		Thyme, English	P



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