

Easy-to-Grow Herbs for the Landscape

The value of herbs has been known for centuries. They have been used as flavorings in foods and as medicines for ailments. In addition to use in medicine and in culinary art, herbs are being used as ornamental plants in the landscape. Herb gardens add interest to any landscape with a wide array of characteristics such as form, aromatic, or unusual foliage. Herbs are used as borders, accent plants, and hedges. Further selection is based on whether the growing site is sunny or shady.

Starting an Herb Garden

Most garden centers offer a broad selection of herbs for immediate planting in the landscape. Select healthy and vigorous-growing plants. The roots should be white to greenish white in color. Be sure not to plant the herb any deeper than where it was growing in the container. Planting too deep may cause the roots to rot.

Choosing a Planting Site

Most herbs thrive best in well-drained soil, with a soil pH of 6.0 to 6.8 for optimum growth. The growing area should be tilled to a depth of 8 - 12 inches. Although herbs are somewhat drought tolerant, adequate soil moisture is required for normal growth. Annual herbs require higher available soil moisture than perennial herbs. Increase the water-holding capacity of sandy soils by adding a 2-inch layer of organic matter such as compost, sphagnum peat moss, or pine bark. Till the organic matter thoroughly into the soil. Heavy clay soils should be amended with compost or pine bark; otherwise, beds should be constructed to provide internal drainage. Using amendment materials modifies the soil structure and texture.

Fertilizing

A proper nutritional balance is important for proper growth. Overfertilization causes succulent, or weak, growth. Succulent growth dilutes the concentration of essential oils, thus limiting the flavor and aroma of the herbs. On the other hand, inadequate fertilization will limit growth, resulting in stunted and weak plants. Use a complete fertilizer containing a 1-2-2 or 1-2-1 ratio, such as 5-10-10 or 5-10-5. In early spring, fertilize perennial herbs using about one-fourth to one-half of the amount of nitrogen used on vegetables. Annual herbs benefit from a light application of a complete fertilizer after each harvest.

Mulching

Mulch with pine bark, straw, or wood chips only established herbs that tolerate moist conditions. Such mulches may rot plants that require drier conditions. An inorganic mulch, such as pea gravel, may be used around plants requiring a drier condition.

Pruning

Tender herbs should be pruned to remove dead tissue in early spring before growth begins. Herbs valued for their young foliage should be pruned regularly during the growing season to encourage fresh, young growth.

Harvesting

To obtain foliage with the maximum amount of oil, harvest in the early morning, after the dew has dried. As the sun warms the foliage, the oil becomes diluted by internal water movement via transpiration. To allow adequate time for regrowth of perennial herbs, do not harvest rigorously after late summer.

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Herb	Height (Inches)	Description	Culture
Anise (<i>Pimpinella anisum</i>)	20-24	Serrated leaves; small white flowers. Low, spreading, slow-growing annual.	Likes moderately rich soil and full sun. Space 6-8 inches in rows 12-14 inches apart.
Basil (<i>Ocimum basilicum</i>)	20-24	Leafy, light-green foliage; white or lavender flowers. Fast-growing annual.	Start seeds indoors in early April or seed in early spring. Space 12 in. Prefers protected, sunny location.
Borage (<i>Borago officinalis</i>)	20-24	Coarse, rough, hairy leaves. Produces light-blue flowers in drooping clusters.	Seed directly in early spring. Space 12 inches. May germinate slowly.
Caraway (<i>Carum cervi</i>) biennial	12-24	Carrot-like leaf with small creamy-white flowers.	Seed directly in spring; locate in full sun. Space 6 inches.
Chervil (<i>Anthriscus cerefolium</i>)	28	Similar to parsley; light-green, lacy leaves. Flowers are small white clusters.	Sow seeds in moist, partially shaded location. Space 6 inches.
Chives (<i>Allium schoenoprasum</i>)	12-18	Dark-green clumps of tubular, grasslike leaves, forming a fluffy lavender pom-pom flower in mid-to-late spring.	Thrives in rich, well-drained soil. Easily propagated from division; seeds germinate very slowly. Divide every 3 years.
Coriander (<i>Coriandrum sativum</i>)	36	Large, coarse plant with white flowers.	Sow seeds in full-sun area; thin to 10 inches.
Dill (<i>Anthem graveolens</i>)	24-36	Tall plant with feathery green leaves. Open, umbrella-shaped flower heads.	Seed directly; thin to 12 inches. If seeds mature and fall, they may come up again next year.
Fennel (<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i>)	36	Fine, feathery leaves with broad, bulb-like leaf base.	Sow in early spring; thin to 12 inches.
Lavender (<i>Lavandula spp.</i>)	12-36	Shrubby perennial with silver-gray foliage and fragrant lavender flowers during midsummer.	Easily started from seed; very fragrant aroma from leaves and flowers. Prefers slightly alkaline, well-drained soil.
Lemon Balm (<i>Melissa officinalis</i>)	24	Spreading plant with yellowish-green, heart-shaped leaves. The leaves give off a lemony aroma when bruised. Spikes of small white, yellow, or pinkish flowers bloom from summer until fall.	Easily propagated from root cuttings in spring or fall; requires sandy, moist soil. Pinch tops to maintain a full, compact plant.
Parsley (<i>Petroselinum crispum</i>)	5-6	Curled or plain dark-green leaves.	May be slow to germinate. Seed in early spring. Space 6-8 inches.
Parsley (<i>Petroselinum spp.</i>)	10-24	Several varieties, including curled, Italian, or French parsley, are available. Even though parsley is a biennial, treat it as an annual. It produces a rather compact plant, forming long, bright-green leaves. Curled parsley makes an excellent seasonal border.	Sow seeds each spring; slow to germinate. Favors well-drained soil.
Peppermint (<i>Mentha x piperita</i>)	12-24	Spreading, bushy perennial with small, highly fragrant leaves; oval-shaped, light-green leaves. Purple flowers are borne in clusters on long spikes.	Easily propagated by seed or division. Can be a nuisance unless spreading roots and stems are confined.
Rosemary (<i>Rosemarinus officinalis</i>)	24-36	Narrow, gray-green, hairy leaves; lighter green stems. Flowers are in various shades of white to deep blue.	rather slow to germinate- propagateRfrom cuttings. Requires well-drained soil in sunny location. Tolerates drought.
Santolina, Lavender Cotton (<i>Santolina chamaecyparissus</i>)	18-24	A compact perennial with silver-gray, coral-like foliage; forms brilliant yellow flowers in June and July. Musky aroma.	Propagate by seed or cuttings. Performs well in poor, dry soil in sunny location.
Savory, Summer (<i>Satureja hortensis</i>)	18	Small gray-green leaves with purple and white flowers.	Plant this tender annual after danger of frost. Space 6-9 in.
Sweet Marjoram (<i>Majorana hortensis</i>)	12	Fine-textured plant with white flowers.	Start seedlings in shade. Mature plants will grow in full sun. Space 8-10 inches.
Thyme, Lemon (<i>Thymus x citriodorus</i>)	6	Trailing growth habit; golden green, highly fragrant leaves. Excellent for rock	Sow seeds and thin; easily propagated by division.
Violet, Sweet (<i>Viola odorata</i>)	6-8	Fragrant perennial with heart-shaped leaves. Sweet, deep-violet or white, fragrant flowers form in March through May.	Propagate by root division in late spring. Thrives in rich, well-drained soil. Usually requires 2 years before flowering.