

GARDEN SPOT NURSERY

Growing and Using Herbs

Herbs have been one of the most essential and documented subjects in civilization. Records going back over 5,000 years detail their uses and benefits. Herbs have been found in paleolithic sites over 60,000 years old. Their medicinal uses were their most sought after qualities, but today we mainly use them culinarily. This will be a brief overview of how to grow, use and preserve some common herbs.

Cultivation

Most of the herbs we use come from a Mediterranean climate, so you will do well to recreate these conditions wherever possible.

- Lots of sun, well-draining soil and good air circulation
- Naturally pest resistant, can be used to ward off bugs
- Pinch back to create full plants
- Lots of space – can grow 3-ft x 3-ft
- Combine hardy (hard) herbs with soft

Cooking

- Basil – Once thought to be beneficial for snake bites, it was planted around churches to guard against the basilisk snake (hence basilica). Here it is beautifully used fresh or fried in Mediterranean and Asian cuisine.
- Chives – The indispensable herb for all things eggy. The beautiful pink blossom imparts a milder taste and is beautiful on top of pasta or salads.
- Cilantro – The love/hate herb that is found in many cultures throughout the world. There is a gene in humans that make it tasty or taste of soap. It is great for Middle Eastern as well as Mexican cuisine.
- Lemon Verbena – Not commonly used but has a terrific flavor steeped in cream for a sauce, in lemon breads or used in teas such as The Garden Spot Tea which you can find on our website.
- Marjoram – Found in the hillsides of the Mediterranean. It has a softer more delicate flavor than oregano and the wild version called Za'atar is used in many flatbreads and savory dishes.
- Oregano – There are many different varieties. Rub a leaf and smell.
- Rosemary – The herb that flavors many focaccias and savory dishes.
- Sage – Not just for Thanksgiving, fried sage leaves can transform summer salads or are particularly good salted for snacks.
- Thyme – My favorite herb! I grow both regular and lemon thyme for almost everything fish, chicken and salad dressing related.

Preservation

Some hardy herbs will continue to be available through the winter season but finding a way to preserve that beautiful summer flavor has both ancient and modern methods.

- Air drying – This is perhaps the oldest method of all. Pick woody herbs and tie their stems together with a rubber band. Hang in a dry warm place with something like Remay fabric around it to catch dried leaves and keep the dust and bugs from the plant.
- Oven drying – Place washed and dried leaves on a rack over a baking sheet and put into a 100 degree oven. This simulates a natural drying climate. Check often to make sure that they do not overbake.
- Dehydrator – Probably the best way to preserve herbs as it will desiccate soft herbs such as basil or parsley without “cooking” them.
- Microwave – Yes, many herbs can be preserved this way, but mainly the woody ones that don’t have much moisture to the leaves.
- Oil – Clean, dry herbs both hard and soft can be preserved in oil which is incredibly useful for grilling, salad dressings and sautés.
- Vinegar – Like oil, vinegar provides a natural preservative. Tarragon vinegar is one of the most used.
- Freezing – Basil made into pesto can be frozen into cubes.
- Compound Butters – Minced herbs and garlic can be mashed into butter, rolled into a sausage shape with plastic wrap, then frozen for future use on vegetables or meats.

Check online for more recipes, tips and techniques and, of course, please come in to Garden Spot Nursery to play among the herbs!