

HERBS



A simple definition of an herb is a plant or plant part valued for its medicinal, savory, or aromatic quality.

Practically every culture around the world has a history of some type of herb use. Chinese herb books date from about 2700 B.C. and include extensive lists of medicinal plants. Italy, India, and Thailand are well known for using herbs in cooking. The Greeks and Romans crowned their heroes with dill and laurel. Regardless of the desired usage, growing and harvesting herbs is easy and rewarding. They can be grown in small spaces or containers, intermingled among vegetables and/or flowers in the garden, or even indoors. Herbs are low maintenance plants, being naturally resistant to diseases and pests.



BASIC GUIDELINES FOR GROWING HERBS

- Plant herbs in average garden soil with organic matter added to improve texture and drainage.
- Choose a site that receives at least 6 hours of direct sun each day.
- Avoid ground where water stands or runs during heavy rains.
- Compensate for poor drainage with raised beds amended with compost.
- Apply balanced fertilizers sparingly to leafy, fast-growing herbs. Heavy applications of



fertilizer, especially those containing large amounts of nitrogen, will decrease the concentration of essential oils in the lush green growth.

Plan your herb garden by grouping herbs according to light, irrigation, and soil requirements. Most herbs

enjoy full sun, but a few tolerate shade. Herbs can be classified as either annual, biennial, or perennial. Be aware of the growth habits of the plants before you purchase them.

TABLE 1. GROWING REQUIREMENTS and USES of ANNUAL HERBS

Plant	Height	Spacing	Light	Uses
Anise	24"	10"	Sun	Leaves in soups, sauces, and salads; oil for flavoring; seeds for seasoning cakes, breads, and cookies.
Basil, sweet	1 to 3'	12"	Sun	Edible flower; leaves in salads, teas, and sandwiches; attracts bees.
Chamomile, sweet false	1 to 2 ½'	4 to 6"	Sun	Tea, potpourris, garnish, crafts.
Chervil	1 ½ to 2'	15"	Partial shade	Leaves in salads, soups, and sauces; teas; butters.
Cilantro (Coriander)	24" to 36"	12 to 18"	Sun	Entire plant is edible; leaves in stews and sauces; stems flavor soups and beans; potpourris, sachets.
Culantro	6" to 8"	8" to 12"	Partial Shade	Used in Caribbean, Latin American, and Asian cuisine; season meats, vegetables, chutneys.
Dill	3 to 5'	3 to 12"	Sun	Teas; seasoning for butter, cakes, bread, vinegars, soups, fish, pickles, salads, etc.

When grown outdoors and given ample air circulation, sunlight, and water drainage, herbs rarely suffer severe disease or insect damage. Traditional synthetic pesticides are not labeled for use on culinary herbs; however, insecticidal soap or horticultural oil are useful against severe outbreaks of aphids, mites, and whiteflies. Hand-pick larger pests such as beetles and caterpillars.

TABLE 1. GROWING REQUIREMENTS and USES of ANNUAL HERBS (Continued)

Plant	Height	Spacing	Light	Uses
Parsley	6 to 18"	6"	Sun	Garnish; flavoring for salads, stews, soups, and sauces
Summer savory	12 to 18"	10 to 12"	Sun	Mild peppery taste; used with meat, cabbage, rice, stuffings, teas, butters, vinegars.



There are many ways to enjoy herb gardening. Intermingle herbs among colorful annuals and perennials in a bed; plant in a vegetable garden (a square foot garden is ideal for small spaces); or plant in containers. A bright windowsill inside your home makes a great spot for growing herbs.

**TABLE 2. GROWING REQUIREMENTS and USES of PERENNIAL AND BIENNIAL HERBS**

Note: The following herbs may be considered ANNUAL in South Carolina due to winter temperatures. Rosemary, Thyme and Lavender, however, are evergreen and typically survive the winter here.

Plant	Height	Spacing	Light	Uses
Bee balm	2 to 3'	12 to 15"	Sun	Attracts bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds; teas; flavors jellies, soups, stews, and fruit salads; edible flowers; dried flowers
Catnip	3 to 4'	12 to 18"	Sun or shade	Teas; fragrance for cats.
Chives	12"	12"	Sun, part shade	Edible flowers; leaves for flavoring, eggs, soups, salads, butter, cheese, dips, spreads, etc.
Fennel	4 to 5'	4 to 12"	Sun	Entire plant edible; seeds in sausage and baked goods; leaves used with fish, vegetables, cheese spreads, and soups.
Garlic	16 to 24"	6"	Sun	Flavor meats, sauces, soups, stews, dressings; medicinal
Hyssop	24"	15"	Sun	Attracts bees and butterflies; mostly decorative usage, potpourris.
Lavender*	24 to 36"	18"	Sun	Potpourris; herb pillows; crafts, vinegars and jellies.
Lemon balm	3'	2'	Sun, part shade	Teas; soups, stew, fish, poultry, vegetables, and meat dishes; garnish; potpourris.
Lemon verbena	2 to 5'	12 to 24"	Sun	Potpourris; herb pillows; lemon flavoring for drinks, salads, and jellies; teas.
Marjoram	1 to 2'	12"	Sun	Flavoring for meats, salads, omelets, vinegars; jellies; teas; flower head for crafts.
Mint	36"	18"	Sun, part shade	Teas, fragrance. Varieties: Peppermint, Spearmint, Lemon, Pineapple, and more
Oregano	24"	8 to 12"	Sun	Flavoring for tomato dishes, meat, poultry and pork stuffings; vegetables and sauces, etc.
Rosemary*	3 to 6'	12"	Sun	Teas; flavoring for vinegar, jam, bread, butters, stuffing, vegetables, stew, and meat dishes.
Sage	18 to 30'	12"	Sun	Seasoning for meat, vegetable and egg dishes; stuffings.
Sage, pineapple	2 to 3'	24"	Sun	Attracts hummingbirds and butterflies; teas; potpourri; cream cheese; jams, jellies.
Spearmint	18"	18"	Sun, part shade	Teas; flavors sauces, jellies, and vinegars; leaves in fruit salad, peas, etc.
Tarragon	24"	12"	Sun	Sauces, salads, soups, omelets, meat, vegetable, and fish dishes.
Thyme*	4 to 12"	6 to 12"	Sun	Teas; attracts bees; sachets; potpourris; flavoring for poultry, fish, stews, soups, tomatoes, cheese, eggs, and rice. Varieties: English, Lemon, Lime, Pink Chintz and more.

* Typically survives winter temperatures in South Carolina.