



Growing Culinary Herbs in Santa Clara County

UC Cooperative Extension Master Gardener Program of Santa Clara County

- **A culinary herb is a leaf of a plant that is used for seasoning**
- **Annual herbs, like annual vegetables, can be divided into cool season and warm season plants. Grow these plants as you would leafy vegetables.**
- **Many perennial herbs that thrive in our climate need the same care as sun-loving, low water use ornamentals. Good drainage is essential; most make excellent container plants. These plants generally have woody stems.**
- **Some perennial herbs die back in the winter even when there is no freeze; they send up new shoots in late winter. These perennial herbs are “herbaceous”; they lack persistent woody parts. They generally need more water and richer soil than woody perennial herbs. Many do well in partial shade.**

Herb	Life cycle	Water needs	Sun needs	Height mature plant	Spacing between plants	How to plant	Comments
Basil, Sweet	Annual	Average	Full sun/ Part shade	18 - 24"	8 - 12"	Start with plant or direct seed	Warmth needed, plant in late spring, pinch off flowers to lengthen harvest season, good for containers. Favorite varieties: Genoa (for pesto), Red Rubin, Fino Verde (compact, small-leaved), Lemon, Siam Queen (a Thai basil variety.) Basil is classic tomato herb.
Bay Laurel	Perennial	Low to Average	Full sun/ Part shade	4 - 40 ft	6 ft	Start with plant	One is enough. Not same plant as California Bay. Control size with pruning, good choice for topiary. Needs good drainage and very little water once established. Good choice for large container. Psyllids can cause leaf curling but damage mainly cosmetic. Favorite variety: Saratoga. Use in soups, stews, roasts; part of classic bouquet garni.
Chervil	Annual	Average	Part shade/ Shade	10"	1 - 3"	Direct seed, self sows	Cool season, plant in early fall or late winter. Shrivels in hot sun. Can sow in dense block. Mild anise-like flavor. Flavor diminishes when cooked - try with eggs, fish, vegetables, in salads.
Chives and Garlic Chives	Perennial	Average	Full sun/ Part shade	12"	8 - 12"	Start with plant	Fertilize a couple times a year, divide every two to four years, good container plants. Harvest by cutting leaves at ground level. Mild onion or garlic flavor best used raw. Blossoms edible, nice in salads.
Cilantro (Coriander)	Annual	Average	Part shade	12 - 24"	3 - 4"	Direct seed or start with plants; can self-sow	Best in cool season, planted in early fall or early spring. For constant supply in warm weather, plant every three weeks in partial shade. Can grow in containers. Favorite varieties: Slow Bolt. Leaves used in Mexican, Asian, Middle Eastern cooking, usually uncooked; great addition to salads. Seeds used as spice, often toasted.

Dill	Annual	Average	Full sun/ Part shade	18 - 36"	1 - 12"	Direct seed, self sows	Sow densely for leaves, 12" apart for seeds. For constant supply of leaves, sow every 3 weeks. Grows best in cool weather. Favorite varieties: Dukat (slow to bolt) for leaves, Mammoth or Bouquet for seeds. Leaves used in salads, with fish and vegetables, best uncooked; seeds used in pickles and breads.
Lavender	Perennial	Low	Full sun	1 - 3 ft	1 - 3 ft	Start with plant	Needs sunny location with excellent drainage, low water use, prune off spent flower stems, good for containers and rock gardens. For culinary purposes choose English lavender (<i>Lavendula angustifolia</i>); many cultivars available. Used in teas, in Herbes de Provence, with meats, fruit, desserts.
Lemon Balm	Perennial	Average	Part shade	24"	24"	Start with plant	One plant enough. Like mint, can be invasive. Substitute for mint for more lemony taste - in tea, with fruit, fish, vegetables.
Lemon Verbena	Perennial	Average/ Low	Full sun/ Part shade	4 - 8 ft	4 ft	Start with plant	Becomes a large shrub, can control size with heavy pruning in early spring. Use for teas, with fruit, fish and poultry. Dries well.
Lovage	Perennial	Average	Part shade	3 - 5 ft	3 ft	Start with plant	One plant is enough! Dies to ground in winter, then sends up leaves and stalk in spring, grows rapidly. Leaves and hollow stalk have celery like flavor - sections of stalk can be used as straws
Marjoram	Perennial	Average/ Low	Full sun	12"	12"	Start with plant	Needs good drainage; good for containers. Look for true marjoram, Origanum majorana. Sweeter and milder, as well as smaller, than closely related oregano but similar uses.
Mint	Perennial	Average/ High	Part shade	8 - 24"	24"	Start with plant	Spreads aggressively via underground stems- place 18" deep barrier around mint bed or keep in containers at least 10" in diameter. Can be divided. Fertilize occasionally. Prune back flowering stems. Most varieties die back in winter, new flush in spring. Favorite varieties: spearmint, peppermint, bergamot, apple, chocolate, many others. Use in teas, savory and sweet dishes. Dries well.
Oregano	Perennial	Low	Full sun	24"	12 - 24"	Start with plant	Needs excellent drainage, prune off spent flower stems. Smaller varieties good for containers and rock gardens. Several different species sold as oregano. Smell and/or taste before buying. Italian, Greek, Sicilian, Syrian -- all differ, all good. Dries well, flavor stands up to cooking.
Parsley	Biennial	Average	Part shade	12 - 18"	8 - 12"	Start with plant	Can be direct seeded, but germination very slow, goes to seed in spring of second year, then dies; best to plant annually. Favorite varieties: Italian Flat Leaf, Moss Curled. Seasoning and salad herb; part of classic bouquet garni.
Rosemary	Perennial	Very low	Full sun	2 - 6 ft	2 - 8 ft	Start with plant	One plant enough for culinary purposes. Needs excellent drainage, good for containers. Favorite varieties: Tuscan blue, Majorca Pink. Smell and/or taste before purchasing a variety; some varieties too resinous for culinary use. Strip leaves from stem and chop or use whole sprig and remove before serving; use with fish, meats, breads, vegetables. Dries well.

Sage	Perennial	Low	Full sun	18 - 30"	24"	Start with plant	Needs excellent drainage - subject to root rot in wet winters. Prune back woody and flowering stems. Good for containers and rock garden. Buy <i>Salvia Officinalis</i> for culinary purposes. Recommended varieties include Berggarten, Tricolor, Purple, Golden. Used with meats, poultry, potatoes, bread, beans, etc. Flavor holds up to cooking and dries well.
Savory, Summer	Annual	Average	Full sun	12 - 18"	6"	Direct seed	Warm season herb, plant in spring. Classic use is with beans; dries well
Savory, Winter	Perennial	Low	Full sun	9 - 12"	24"	Start with plant	Needs good drainage. Cut back occasionally. Life expectancy short, 3-4 years. Good for containers and rock garden. Favorite varieties: Winter savory, Creeping winter savory, Pink savory. Use in soups, stews, with beans. Stronger flavor than summer savory. Dries well.
Tarragon	Perennial	Average	Full sun/ Part shade	18 - 24"	24"	Start with plant	Herbaceous perennial that dies back in winter, new shoots come up in early spring. Can be grown in container. Propagate by root division or cuttings; does not flower. Strip leaves from stems before chopping. Good with fish, chicken, eggs, vegetables, salads; used to flavor vinegar.
Thyme	Perennial	Low	Full sun	6 - 12"	12"	Start with plant	Needs well drained soil. Cut back occasionally, leaving half of plant. Life expectancy short, 3-4 years. Good for containers and rock garden. Look for culinary thymes such as English, French and Silver, Lemon (including a variegated variety), Lime, and Caraway. Stands up well to cooking in soups and stew; part of classic bouquet garni.

Resources: mgsantaclara.ucanr.edu UCCE Master Gardeners of Santa Clara County website

ucanr.edu/sites/sacmg/Herbs_831 Very useful information about growing culinary herbs from Sacramento Master Gardeners. Includes links to relevant UC Cooperative Extension articles.

hwww.ipm.ucdavis.edu Information about plant pests and diseases and how to control them

smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/herbs-and-flowers Directory of information on growing herbs from Oregon State University Cooperative Extension

nchfp.uga.edu National Center for Home Food Preservation website