

## Herbs

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Q: I just moved here from the Midwest and am excited to have an herb garden all year long. Are there herbs that I can plant that will grow all year so that I can have cooking herbs fresh from the garden?

A: Yes, there are quite a few and many are very attractive in pots, planted in the border or vegetable garden. This is a great time to purchase young nursery plants that can be planted into pots or the landscape. Many herbs are also easily grown from seed. Here are a few that you may want to start with:

**PARSLEY** is a biennial herb that comes in two varieties. The flat leaf variety is believed to be more flavorful, and curly leaf parsley makes a more attractive garnish. In most gardens Parsley may live over a second year and if let go to seed at the end of the second year will reseed itself.

**ROSEMARY** is a tough perennial that comes in a multitude of deer-resistant selections from low-growing ground covers to upright varieties that grow to five, even six feet tall. These plants look very attractive in the landscape and bloom early in the spring offering color to the garden. They are hardy in the winter cold, heat, full sun, and have good drought resistance. They soldier on through our blistering summers and winter deluges, always available for fragrant sprigs to season the roast or sauce.

**CHIVES** are an onion relative that grows in one-foot clumps with narrow, green leaves. You can use all parts from the leaves to the rosy-purple blossoms for a garnish on soups or to top salads. Grow its taller relative, garlic chives for its distinctly garlicky-flavored leaves. Its blossoms too are edible, as are the lively-flavored unopened buds. They are winter hardy and clumps will slowly spread.

**THYME** is another cold and drought-resistant herb. English thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) grows about one foot tall with tiny leaves and makes a nice potted plant. Other thyme selections such as silver, lemon, orange or lime and those with variegated leaves are more ornamental, but can be less hardy. All offer wonderful flavor additions to soups, salad and sauces.

**OREGANO** is a must for Greek and Italian cooking and come in several ornamental varieties. *Oregano vulgare* are the best for culinary use. Choose one

that has a fragrance and flavor that you like. Plants may freeze back some in the winter but come back from the roots every spring.

MINT is another wonderful herb that comes in a delightful selection of flavors such as chocolate, orange and peppermint. Make sure to grow in pots to corral its roaming roots or you may have an entire herb garden just of mint.

SAGE comes in countless attention-getting ornamental forms, but for cooking look for one-to- two feet-tall garden sage, *Salvia officianalis*. Some have colorful or variegated leaves, and all require good drainage. These may freeze back in the winter and require planting new plants in the spring.

One herb that is not winter hardy, but I would be hard pressed to cook without, is fresh basil. There are many different varieties that are quite attractive in the landscape such as ‘Deep Purple’ and ‘Siam Queen’ I like to plant several different varieties from the traditional sweet basil type to the “Spicy Bush” variety. Basil is a cold-sensitive annual that you will need to replant every year but is well worth the effort. Pinch off flower heads as they form or the plants tend to get woody.

In general, herbs plants will need six to eight hours of sun a day, and like almost all plants, under-watering or overwatering can be fatal.