



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Fall Plantings: Herbs Belong in Every Garden (Lifestyle October 2021)

by Sue Merrill, UCCE Master Gardener

Although there are many definitions of an herb, a simple one that's easy to remember is "a plant from which roots, stems, leaves, flowers, or fruits are used for medicine, food, flavoring, or fragrance." Now you may ask, "Isn't that most of the plant kingdom?" My reply is "Yes!" and that is why I love calling the plants in my garden, herbs. Nearly all are useful in one context or another.

Humans have used herbs since the beginning of time. At first these plants were the only known types of medication for ailments. The blue flowering lobelia was used for asthma, primroses were used for bronchitis, parsley for colic, flax, mustard, and rhubarb for constipation, garlic, raspberry and catnip for diarrhea, and the list goes on.



I like to classify herbs in different categories for which they are best known and used. All kinds of mints and lavenders were used in tussie mussies (small bouquets held in the hand) to ward off noxious smells and germs. Spearmint and peppermint are considered "hospitality" herbs and were hung on doorways to welcome visitors. Rosemary's theme is "remembrance" and lavenders' is "devotion".

Though I've been enamored with herbs for years, I still only grow them for their beauty and texture. I especially enjoy echinacea (purple coneflower), St. John's wort, foxglove, feverfew and comfrey.

There are other types of herb gardens I particularly enjoy, including my favorite, the culinary garden. Here you can grow all types of useful and aromatic herbs in a separate bed by the kitchen or intermingled with other landscape plants. Some culinary herbs are perennials, such as rosemary, chives, parsley, thyme, oregano, marjoram, garden sage, bay tree, thyme and some basil. Many are annuals that are grown in the summer months. These are used fresh, but also are dried or frozen for use later in the year, such as basil in olive oil pesto sauce.

My favorite culinary herb is basil, which I lavishly use in Italian cooking. My second favorite is cilantro. How can you enjoy Mexican food without the flavor of cilantro? There is also a perennial Vietnamese cilantro that has a slightly different flavor.

A fragrance garden could have catmint, chamomile, curry plant, any of the lavender varieties, tansy and lemon balm (or any mint). Be careful to contain the growth of mints as they usually have runners that rapidly spread and will soon take over your garden. Pineapple sage is my all-time fragrance favorite. Its long red blooms have the most wonderful pineapple aroma from August to frost. Also available are many different kinds of scented geraniums that can leave delicious smells when you brush up against them.

The easiest way to get started growing herbs is to plant them in containers. Take some of the culinary herbs you may use in your cooking and plant them together in a 12" pot. An example might be basil, oregano, marjoram, and garlic. If a bigger pot is available, then plant a small bay tree in the center for a focal point. Voila! You

now have your herbs for the next pot of spaghetti. Put the container where it gets sun. Most herbs need at least 6 hours of sun a day, but there are exceptions.

If you have children (or are still young at heart as I am) then a bird, bee, and butterfly garden is interesting and fun to have. Bee-balm or monarda is a favorite herb of hummingbirds and bees. Others include Spanish lavender (or really any lavender), Mexican sage, lamb's ear, butterfly bush (buddleia), catmint, chamomile, any sage, and of course nasturtiums and sunflowers.

Take advantage of the fall planting season and try growing some herbs or new varieties in your garden to enjoy the wonderful sensory pleasures they give. They are easy to interplant with existing flowers and vegetables, and many become wonderful groundcovers and shrubs. I've only mentioned a few of the most common herbs, but there are hundreds of herb plants and many books and people that could expand your knowledge of this fascinating treasure.



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