



## HERB GARDENING

### Kim Wilson, UC Master Gardener



### Herb Gardening

Herbs are plants used for culinary, aromatic or medicinal purposes. Their varied foliage, colors and textures add interest to the garden while attracting pollinators, butterflies and hummingbirds and the occasional kitty.

### Classification of herbs

- Annuals: Single season plants; good as fill ins for vegetable garden.
- Biennials: Grow leaves/shoots first year then flower and seeds the second year.
- Perennial: Grow for years, blooming each year. French tarragon, rosemary, winter savory, sage, thyme, rosemary, lovage, lemon balm are examples. Once established they can be drought tolerant.
- In our climate, thyme, rosemary, sage, oregano, borage and mints are perennials. Basil is very frost and cold sensitive.

### Site selection

- Wide spectrum of possibilities: from a few potted kitchen herbs to scattered throughout the vegetable garden or landscape or a formal herb garden.
- Group plants in the garden based on water or soil needs and sun exposure requirements. See Environmental Horticultural Notes, Culinary Herb Profiles in our references for guidelines.
- Moist and shady: Angelica, coriander, horseradish
- Dry, no fertilizer: lavender, sage, rosemary
- Partial shade tolerant: chervil, mint, chives, cilantro, lemon balm, French tarragon.
- Re-seeders: dill, fennel, borage
- Most herbs require full sun, at least 6 hours. Indoor herbs do best in south facing window with 5 hours sun.
- In general, herbs do not need rich soil, exceptions are fennel, lovage and chervil. All herbs do require well-draining soil. For poorly draining soil, amend with compost or plant in raised beds or containers.
- Annual herbs are good fill-in plants for vegetable or flower gardens. Perennials should be located where they can stay undisturbed for years. Root-aggressive herbs like the mints, borage and lemon balm, can be grown in pots.

### Planting

- Herbs such as basil, dill, borage, fennel and cilantro can be seeded directly into the garden. Seeds can also be started inside for later transplanting.
- When planting from seed, follow seed packet instructions and do not plant too deep. Keep seed bed evenly moist to encourage growth and to support young seedlings as they sprout.
- Choose potted herb plants to get a faster and easier start on an herb garden. For potted herbs, dig planting hole twice as wide but at same depth as pot and water in well at. If roots are dense or compacted, loosen or trim as needed.

## Care

- Shallow rooted annual herbs should be watered to a depth of 4-6 inches, deep rooted perennials like rosemary to 18 inches.
- Once established, most perennial herbs prefer soil to dry between waterings but annuals tend to need regular water.
- The amount and interval of irrigation depends on soil type and climate.

## Harvesting

- Culinary herbs should be harvested before flowering. Allowing a few plants to flower adds interest to garden and provides a source of pollen and nectar for bees, pollinators, hummingbirds and butterflies.
- Pick herbs in the morning, after dew evaporates, when oils are most intense.
- Prune herbs down to leaf nodes to encourage lateral growth. This is important in spindly plants like basil and lemon verbena.
- Herbs can be rinsed off or swished in a bowl of water to remove any dirt residue. Spread out on paper towels to dry and remove any chewed or discolored leaves.

## Drying and Storing Herbs

- Herbs can be used fresh or dried.
- Air drying: Tie herbs in small bundles, hang upside down in a warm indoor location with good air circulation. Drying time varies but herbs are dry when the leaves crumble easily.
- Oven drying: spread in single layer on a shallow pan, put oven on lowest setting with door open, or just use heat from pilot light. Stir occasionally.
- Microwave drying: place herbs on paper towel, microwave on low and stir between 30 sec intervals.
- Frost free refrigerator drying: place herbs in paper bag to dry.
- Store dried herb leaves whole for best retention of flavor and aroma. Herbs stored in air tight glass containers away from sun or heat will retain their flavor for 6-12 months.

## Pests and Diseases

- Aphids and spittlebugs can be sprayed off with a strong stream off water.
- Black bean aphids can be a difficult pest of chives. They are resistant to spraying with water. It is best to catch infestations early but if plant is heavily infested, cut to the ground and discard. This will allow plant to regrow without the pests.
- Avoid pesticides, which, in general, are not needed, as herbs are mostly pest and disease free. Pesticides can harm pollinators and butterflies attracted to the herb flowers.

## References

*Basic Herbs for the Kitchen Garden.* Tulare/Kings Master Gardener Program. UCCE.

[https://ucanr.edu/sites/UC\\_Master\\_Gardeners/files/139132.pdf](https://ucanr.edu/sites/UC_Master_Gardeners/files/139132.pdf)

*Culinary Herb Profiles.* Environmental Horticulture Notes. EHN70. UCANR.

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*Herbs.* Home and Garden Information Center. University of Maryland Extension

<https://extension.umd.edu/hgic/topics/herbs>

*Landscaping with Herbs.* Environmental Horticulture Notes. EHN15. UCANR.

<https://ucanr.edu/sites/sacmg/files/116769.pdf>

Schellman, Anne. *Herbs in your Garden: a Guide to Use, Cultivation and Selection of Herbs.* UCCE

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**UC MASTER GARDENERS 2156 SIERRA WAY, SUITE C SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA 93401** email: [anrmgslo@ucanr.edu](mailto:anrmgslo@ucanr.edu)

GARDENING QUESTIONS? ASK THE MASTER GARDENERS - HELPLINE: 805-781-5939



Website: Master Gardeners San Luis Obispo

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