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**ADVICE TO GROW BY » SONOMA COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS**

**Herb gardening is a fun learning activity for kids and July in the garden**



**Children can have fun and learn at the same time by growing herbs, like basil. CHAD SURMICK / THE PRESS DEMOCRAT**

**Question: I really enjoy growing herbs. How can I encourage my kids to have fun growing them, too?**

**Answer:** This is a wonderful time for you and your children to plant a container herb garden that will delight your senses, provide edible herbs for your kitchen and nurture pollinators and beneficial insects.

Children will be excited to plant the herbs you use in your kitchen and intrigued by their different scents. They can practice their literacy skills as they learn the different names of plants and read the seed packets and instructions. They develop physical and sensory skills by carrying tools, digging in the dirt, feeling the soil and smelling and tasting the herbs.

Children love to water plants. Show them how to do it responsibly, so the plants get just the right amount of water at the right time. As you work together, take the opportunity to teach children about the importance of water conservation.

Gardens offer children a sense of responsibility and wonder as they label the seeds they have planted, predict when they will sprout and watch them grow until the plants are ready to harvest. As a reward for all their work, allow them to pinch or snip a few bunches of herbs for cooking.

Herbs are easy to grow; many require very little water. Group together plants that have similar sunlight and water requirements. Don't be afraid to experiment. Most herbs are fairly hardy and will survive even if you make a mistake while planting them. The following herb combinations have the same sun and water requirements:

- Chives, basil and dill
- Cilantro, dill and tarragon
- Oregano, sage and thyme

Plant your herb garden in a pot that is at least 12 inches in diameter and located near the house, to give you easy access when you harvest the herbs. You and your children can have fun experimenting with combinations. For example, you could plant basil, oregano and thyme in the same pot for a pizza herb garden.

Here are a few other considerations for planting herbs:

- Basil grows well with many herbs, except for sage.
- Mint is an aggressive plant and should be planted in its own pot.
- Fennel can be invasive and should also be planted in a pot by itself.

For more information on low-water use kitchen herbs, go to <https://bit.ly/3nxcqJD>



**Chives, above, basil and dill have the same sun and water requirements. Most herbs are fairly hardy and will survive even if you make a mistake while planting them.** DEAN FOSDICK / ASSOCIATED PRESS

## July in the garden

As we head into our driest season during a record-breaking drought, it's doubly important to use water wisely by taking these steps:

- Check, adjust and repair irrigation pipes, valves and sprinkler heads to eliminate clogs or leaks.
- Convert sprinkler or bubbler heads to drip irrigation wherever possible.
- Water early, in the coolest part of the day (before 7 a.m.) and use just enough water to keep your plants alive.
- Water the roots of plants, not the leaves.
- Prioritize which plants should get water. Assign highest priority to trees and shrubs. They provide shade, clean the air, take years to mature and are expensive to replace.
- Consider letting go of highwater- use plants. You can replace them in the fall with drought-tolerant plants. Don't water lawns.
- Remove weeds. They compete with your plants for water and nutrients.
- Check with your water supply agency for current water-use restrictions.

You also can provide a shallow water source, such as a bird bath, for thirsty birds and bees. Place some rocks and stones along the edges so insects can reach the water without drowning.

Cut or pinch flowers off basil plants so the energy continues to go into the parts you want to eat. When harvesting individual leaves, remember that the lower leaves are the oldest.

Keep an eye on summer squashes such as zucchini, crookneck and patty pan. Harvest them when they are small and still tender.

Dig up overcrowded bulbs after their foliage dies and store them in a cool, dry place for fall replanting.

To force new foliage and encourage repeat blooms, cut back perennials such as Nepeta (catmint), Shasta daisy and Penstemon.

To stimulate additional blooms, deadhead plants that have a long bloom season, such as roses, dahlias, marigolds, cone flowers and geraniums.

*Contributors to this week's column were Karen Felker, Patricia Rosales, Ellie Samuel and Debbie Westrick. The UC Master Gardener Program of Sonoma County <https://sonomamg.ucanr.edu/> provides environmentally sustainable, science-based horticultural information to Sonoma County home gardeners. Send your gardening questions to [scmgpd@gmail.com](mailto:scmgpd@gmail.com). You will receive answers to your questions either in this newspaper or from our Information Desk. You can contact the Information Desk directly at 707-565-2608 or [mgsonoma@ucanr.edu](mailto:mgsonoma@ucanr.edu).*