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# INTEGRATING CULINARY HERBS INTO THE GARDEN

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Growing your own herbs can be fun, easy, and affordable. The most popular herbs to grow and use are the culinary herbs, which are used for both cooking and seasoning foods.

Culinary herbs are those whose fresh or dried leaves are used in cooking; some of the most common culinary herbs are basil, parsley, French tarragon, chives, rosemary and thyme.

Culinary Herbs can be incorporated into your existing flower and vegetable beds, or grown separately; preferably close to the kitchen or even in a sunny location in your kitchen.

## Tips for Growing Culinary Herbs

Growing culinary herbs is very similar to growing vegetables. Two important things to consider include: harvesting your herbs at full flavor, and *never* using any fertilizer or pesticide on them that isn't labeled for use on edible plants.

Culinary herbs can do double duty as ornamental plants. Parsley, especially the curly variety, makes a wonderful edging plant, if you don't have rabbits nearby.

Tall herbs, like bay laurel, can be potted and used as focal points. Herbs with variegated leaves, like golden or tricolor sage, are great in mixed containers, in flower beds, and other areas of interest.

The fact that you are growing herbs for seasoning does not need to limit your use of them in various areas of your landscape and /or garden. Many of the new varieties of basil, for instance, provide colorful contrasts (burgundy, lime, and light green) in the landscape.

Herbs that tend to spread, like mint and oregano can be grown in containers. The containers can be sunk into the ground, in the garden, or used as accent pots. *Note: don't let the tips of the plants hang over and touch the ground, or they will root, grow, and spread.*

## Harvesting Culinary Herbs

Most annual herbs taste their best before they flower. Once the annual herbs flower, their older leaves begin to decline and new leaves are smaller and bitter.

Remember to pinch and use your herbs often. Even young plants need to be pinched back to encourage them to branch out and become full.

Annual herbs, like basil, can be pinched when they are 3-4 inches tall. If your herb plants begin setting flowers in earnest, shear back the whole plant by 1/3 and try to start using them more frequently.

## More Creative Tips

Since many culinary herbs are annuals, consider placing them in pots on your porch, or in your flower beds or even in window boxes.

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When selecting a planting location consider a southern or western exposure for both a sunny and warm location. A good combination of both upright and trailing herbs includes creeping thymes and/or oregano.

One of my favorite and most versatile culinary herbs is Rosemary, which is a perennial that makes it a great ornamental as well as provides year round interest in the garden.

It is also known to be deer resistant and can be used as a border plant to protect other plants that are less deer resistant. Don't forget to enhance the flavor of your barbecue using Rosemary cuttings as skewers for Kabobs!

Integrating culinary herbs into the garden or landscape provides an opportunity to add colorful, fragrant, and useful plants in your garden!

### References

*Growing Herbs, Department of Horticulture: Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service*

<http://www.hort.purdue.edu/ext/HO-28.pdf>

*Growing, Harvesting and Using Culinary Herbs* <http://www.uri.edu/ce/factsheets/sheets/herbs.html>

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