

HERB GARDENS

The first herb gardens in the late 17th century were designed as physic gardens for the study of medicinal herbs. Today, herbs have come into their own as ornamental plants that add beauty and fragrance to the garden.

Classic Herb Gardens

The classic layout uses radiating paths around a central focal point, such as an urn, bird-bath or statue. Bricks or tiles often divide the area into smaller beds and pathways.

Choose a themed-garden: Kitchen garden (including thyme, sage, basil, tarragon, dill); a single-color garden (including silvery horehound, lavender, artemesia, and worm-wood); a scented garden (including mint, scented geranium, lemon balm, silver thyme, and rosemary); or a garden with different varieties of a specific herb (common sage, Tricolor sage, golden sage, purple sage, clary sage, pineapple sage).

Grow herbs in mixed borders, using them as edging plants, ground covers, etc., wherever their fragrance and texture can be appreciated up close.

Herbs in Containers

Containers allow you to keep herbs right outside your kitchen door. You can also bring in the more tender herbs to overwinter in a sunny window. For interest and contrast, mix leaf textures and colors. For example, pair the needle-like leaves of rosemary with bolder leaves of sage. Thyme's tiny foliage call attention to itself when placed next to lacy parsley plants.

Herbs for the Beginner

Hardy Herbs -- winter savory, rosemary, sage, oregano
Accent Herbs-- sweet basil, dill, mint, sweet marjoram, tarragon, thyme
Herbs for Blending -- chives, parsley, summer savory

As your interest and needs increase, you can add to the variety of herbs in your garden.

- Annuals (bloom one season and die) -- anise, basil, chervil, coriander, dill, summer savory
- Biennials (live two seasons, blooming second season only) -- caraway, parsley
- Perennials (overwinters; blooms each season once established) -- chives, fennel, lovage, marjoram, mint, tarragon, thyme, winter savory.

Growing Conditions

Drainage is probably the most important single factor in successful herb growing. None of the herbs will grow in wet soils. You can create a raised planting bed and mix in lots of compost to amend your soil if it is heavy clay. Most herbs like a sunny spot, although some (like mint - plant in containers) can tolerate part shade.

Harvesting Herbs

You can pick fresh leaves as soon the plant has enough foliage to maintain growth. If drying herbs, harvest leaves before the flower buds open. Herbs can be dried or frozen, and stored for the next great meal.

Note: If using herbs for medicinal purposes, consult your physician first.