

May 2023 Gardener's Corner

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Culinary Herbs



Potted Kitchen Herbs

Culinary herbs are some of the most rewarding plants to grow. They do especially well in our Mediterranean climate, have mostly low water requirements, often attract pollinators, and provide us with a bounty of flavors to liven up our favorite dishes.

Herbs are classified as either perennial or annual. Shrubby perennials include lavender, rosemary, the thymes including English, French, silver and lemon, and common sage, which can be green or purple. Oregano, marjoram, French tarragon, chives and mint are also perennials, but die back partially or completely in the winter. Oregano can be Greek, Italian or Mexican, and mints include peppermint and spearmint, among countless others. Basil, including Italian, Thai, purple and Greek varieties is an annual, as are cilantro, dill and summer savory. A few herbs, such as parsley (both flat leaved and curly) and fennel, are biennials, meaning they grow through one season, then set seed and die the following season. These are only a few of the many varieties available.



Mint

Happily, herbs are not fussy about types of soil, fertilization or water. Basil, Chives and mint like regular watering, while others have low water needs. They are mostly pest free, although aphids can be a problem as well as white flies and spider mites. Chives may be attacked by bulb mites, small black insects that look like aphids clustering at the base of the plant. Aphids, white flies and mites can be discouraged by strong frequent sprays of water. Neem oil or insecticidal soaps are also good controls, although they will probably have to be re-applied several times.

When planting herbs, it is important to keep in mind their mature size, water needs and growth habits. A few, such as parsley, fennel, dill and cilantro prefer cooler weather, growing best in spring or fall. These can grow to about 1 ½ to 2 feet tall and about 12 inches wide. Perennials are best planted in spring or fall, and can last many seasons. Upright rosemary and lavender are the largest of these and can grow as high as 4 ft. and spread up to 3 ft. wide, although they will withstand heavy pruning.

Prostrate rosemary makes a good ground cover, about 8 inches in height and spreading several feet. Sages can grow approximately 2 ft. high and as wide, and English or French thyme reach 1 ½ to 2 feet in height and width. Marjoram, a sweet smelling relative of oregano, grows to about 1 ½ to 2 feet tall and wide. Chives and tarragon will die back completely during the coldest months, while the growth of oregano and mint will slow, and they should be cut back to just above ground level. Except for chives, these are spreading low growing plants. Basil is an annual and a heat loving plant, growing to 1 ½ ft. tall and wide, that thrives during the summer but dies as soon as cool weather arrives. All herbs should be trimmed often to keep growth neat and compact. Use the cuttings to season your cooking.

Most herbs grow well in large pots. You can even group several together in a half-barrel. Many are quite attractive, adding interest to a perennial bed. Mint should always be contained in a pot to keep it from taking over your yard. Keep plants with low water requirements grouped together. There are many books showing layouts for herb gardens from informal to the formal knot gardens found on fancy estates. Herbs are calling you to let your creativity loose in the garden and in the kitchen!

Large Container Herbal Garden Selection



May Garden Checklist

- Control ants with baits or traps. Eliminate standing water in flowerpots, drain pipes or gutters to control mosquitos.
- Keep monitoring citrus for Asian Citrus Psyllid
- Look for oozing or dead limbs on apple, crabapple, pear and pyracantha, a sign of Fire Blight.
- Continue monitoring and adjusting irrigation according to the weather.
- Apply mulch to bare areas.
- Check for signs of powdery mildew on apple, crepe myrtle, rose and stone fruits. Control with neem oil.
- Put out and maintain Yellowjacket traps.
- Plant or sow seeds of cucumber, squash, and melons. Start seed potatoes. Also plant summer annuals such as zinnias, petunias and vinca.
- Aerate lawns that get heavy foot traffic.
- Fertilize cane berries, citrus, deciduous fruit trees, palms, and heavy flowering shrubs with slow release fertilizer if not done in March or April.