



Growing Culinary Herbs

History of Herbs

- Early settlers brought herbs to the new world
 - Remedies for illnesses
 - Store with linens
 - Burning for fragrance
 - Flavoring
- Colonists introduced each other to herb gardening
- Thomas Jefferson grew 26 kinds of herbs in his “kitchen garden” and printed his *Garden Book*, 1766-1824

What is an herb?

- An herb is a “Useful Plant”
- Could be
 - Annuals
 - Perennials
 - Biennials
 - Trees
 - Shrubs

Seasonings Classifications

- **Herbs**- leaves of plants grown in the temperate zone
- **Spices**- roots, bark, buds, berries or fruits of aromatic plants usually grown in the tropics
- **Seeds**- from either tropical spice plants or herb plants

Getting Started with Herbs

- What does your site look like?
- Do you have enough light?
- What do you want to grow?
- Should you start from seed or transplants?

Site

- Full sun
- Average soil – average fertility
- Some prefer moist
 - Mint
 - Rosemary
 - Lemon balm
- Some prefer dry, sunny - Thyme

Starting from Seed- Most annuals are best started from seed

- Basil
- Dill
- Parsley
- Cilantro/Coriander
- Sage (easiest of all perennial herbs to start from seed)

Starting from Plants:

Cuttings, Divisions, Started plants best for most Perennial Herbs

- Lavender
- Rosemary
- Sage
- Tarragon (seed started Tarragon has poor flavor)
- Bay
- Marjoram
- Mint

Container Herbs

- Herbs in containers are great
 - Easier maintenance
 - Easier to harvest
 - Reduced risk of spread

Maintenance and Care

- Potential to lose moisture faster
- During hottest months may require checking moisture twice daily
- Always allow water to drain out the bottom of the container
- Avoid excessive fertilizer
- Pinch back to control spindly growth

Common Herb Problems

- Plants wilt
 - Lack of water or too much
 - Leaf edges become “burn” or die and turn dry or brittle
 - High salt
 - Leggy, spindly
 - Low light, too much nitrogen
 - Yellowing from bottom
 - Too much water, low fertility (Nitrogen is mobile in soil)
 - Overwatering – root rots

Growing Herbs Indoors

- Some of the easiest herbs to grow indoors:
 - Chives
 - Thyme
 - Basil

- Parsley
- Sage
- Oregano
- Mint
- Bay

Perennial Herbs

French Tarragon

- Plant in full sun, well drained soil
- Harvest in June for steeping in vinegar
- Harvest in early to mid-July for drying
- Often used in various sauces such as tartar and white sauce, herb vinegar

Chives

- Perennial
- Linear
- Onion-flavor
- Or garlic-flavor

Sage

- Long –lived perennial
- Leathery gray-green leaves

Thyme

- Perennial
- Small aromatic leaves
- Pink flower clusters
- Low growing

Oregano

- Perennial
- Aromatic leaves
- Pink or white flowers
- Species
 - Greek oregano (*O. hirtum*)
 - Common oregano (*O. vulgare*)
 - Sweet marjoram (*O. majorana*)

Mint

- Perennial
 - Spearmint – *Mentha spicata*
 - Peppermint – *Mentha piperita*

Annual Herbs

Parsley

- Grown as an annual in Illinois, but is actually a biennial
- Easy to grow in containers and hanging baskets
- Curly for garnish
- Flat-leaf for flavoring
- Grows well in full sun or partial shade
- Harvest leaves any time during the growing season

Basil

- Easy to grow annual
- Grow in containers or in ground
- Best in full sun
- Lots of varieties available
- Harvest leaves at any time

Bay

- Not hardy in Illinois
- Evergreen
- Grow in full sun to part shade with moderately rich, well-drained soil
- Harvest and dry throughout the year.
- Traditionally used in soups, just remember to take out before serving!

Cilantro

- Foliage is cilantro
- Seed is coriander
- Annual
- Bolts quickly in warm weather
- Best in full sun

Dill

- Feathery, blue-green leaves
- Yellow flowers
- Reseeds easily

Rosemary

- Tender perennial
- Needle-like foliage
- Blue to white flowers
- Upright to trailing

Nasturtium

- Annual
- Round, green leaves
- Cup-shaped flowers
- Harvesting Fresh Herbs
- Pick or buy herbs close to the time you plan to use them
- In most cases you harvest the leaves, but other plant parts may also be used

Harvesting

- Annuals
 - Anytime before flowering
 - Can be cut severely
 - For seed, let plants mature
- Perennials
 - Not cut back as heavy
 - Remove 1/3
 - Avoid heavy fall pruning
- Pick herbs close to the time you plan to use them

- Depending on the herb, harvest may include one or more plant parts. In most cases you harvest the leaves, but in some cases you pick flowers, seeds or roots.
- Handle blossoms just as you would handle leaves. Often, you harvest blossoms with the leaves and mix them together.

Storing Fresh Herbs

1. Snip off the ends of the stems on the diagonal
2. Place herbs in a tall glass with ~ 1 inch water
3. Cover loosely with a plastic bag or plastic wrap
4. Place in refrigerator and replace water when it gets cloudy

Or

Wrap in a damp paper towel, place in an opened plastic bag and place in the refrigerator

Freezing Herbs

To freeze whole herbs:

1. Wash, shake off, pat dry with clean paper towel
2. Wrap a few sprigs or leaves in freezer wrap and place in a freezer bag
3. Seal and freeze

To freeze chopped herbs:

1. Chop and spoon into ice cube trays
2. Add water or olive oil and freeze
3. When frozen, wrap cubes individually in plastic or put in freezer safe container

Use frozen herbs within 4-6 months for best quality

Drying Herbs

Wash herbs, shake and pat dry. Expose to warm, dry, well-ventilated air. Sun drying is NOT recommended.

- **Air drying**
 - Sturdy herbs- Tie in small bundles and hang them to air dry
 - Tender herbs- Tie in small bundles and suspend in a paper bag, closing the top with a rubber band. Cut small holes in bag.
- **Microwave drying**
Follow manufacturers' directions
- **Dehydrator drying**
Pre-heat dehydrator to 95-115°F
Place in single layer on trays
Drying times may vary from 1 to 4 hours
- **Oven drying**
Lay leaves on paper towel, without allowing leaves to touch
Cover with another towel. 5 layers may be dried at a time.
Dry in a very cool oven. The oven light furnishes enough heat for overnight drying.
- Leaves are dry when crispy and crumble easily between fingers
- May leave whole and crumble as used or coarsely crumble before storage
- Place herbs in airtight containers and store in a cool, dry, dark areas
- For best flavor, use within 1 year

Resources

- Growing Herbs Youtube Video
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AJLIxj2APIQ>
- Herb Gardening Website
 - <http://urbanext.illinois.edu/herbs/>

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The information in this hand out is for educational purposes only.

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