

Growing Herbs

Herbs are tolerant of a wide range of growing conditions and they grow well with very little maintenance. However, for best results we have divided the herbs into four categories. If you follow the growing hints for each group, your herbs should be healthy, flavoursome and fragrant.

Soil preparation and aspect

Soil preparation is the same as for vegetables. Generally, herbs prefer a light, well-drained, crumbly soil, but most will grow satisfactorily in fairly heavy soil provided there is good drainage.

Before planting, dig the soil to a depth of about 25 cm. Remove all weeds and break up clods to bring the soil to a moderately fine texture. If the soil lacks humus, place 5–10 cm of organic matter on the surface and dig in to spade depth. At the same time, apply animal manure, blood and bone, or a complete fertiliser. Agricultural lime or dolomite would also be beneficial if mixed in at the rate of about half a cup to the square metre. If possible, prepare the soil several weeks before planting.

For best results, plant herbs where they will receive sun all day. Some, such as parsley and mint, are tolerant of partial shade.

1. Vegetable Culture Herbs

Anise, Basil, Caraway, Capsicums (Sweet Peppers and Chillies), Catnip, Chervil, Chicory, Chives, Cumin, Coriander, Dill, Endive, Fennel, Garlic, Horseradish, Land Cress, Lovage, Parsley, Rocket, Salad Burnet, Shallots.

Hints

- *High soil fertility: use organic or complete fertilisers with high nitrogen content at rates recommended for vegetables.*
- *Water well in summer.*

2. Mediterranean Climate Herbs

Catmint, Chamomile, Curry Bush (Grey Leaf), French Tarragon, Germander, Hyssop, Lavender, Lemon Verbena, Marjoram, Nasturtium, Oregano, Pineapple Sage, Pyrethrum, Rosemary, Rue, Sage, Santolina, Savories, Scented Geraniums (Pelargoniums), Thyme, Wormwood, Yarrow.



Hints

- *Low to moderate soil fertility: these plants thrive if mushroom compost is used as a soil conditioner or surface mulch.*
- *Lime soils: as plants in this group are mainly natives of chalky (limey) soil, an annual application of lime or dolomite would be beneficial.*
- *Extremely well drained soil: if you have poorly drained clay soil, raise beds at least 20 cm. Incorporating gypsum and compost will improve drainage.*
- *Avoid overwatering.*

3. Ample Summer Moisture Herbs

Angelica, Baytree, Bergamot, Cardamon, Comfrey, Elderberry Five-in-one, Heartsease, Lemon Balm, Lemon Grass, Lovage, Mints, Sorrel, Water Cress.

Hints

- *High soil fertility - as for group 1.*
- *These herbs will not flourish if allowed to dry out, especially in summer. If regular watering is not possible, mix organic compost into the soil and also surface mulch to a depth of at least 5 cm to help retain moisture. The soil should have reasonable drainage rather than being water logged.*
- *Mints and Water Cress perform best in wet conditions.*

4. Suit Most Conditions

Aloe Vera, Borage, Feverfew, Purple Coneflower, Tansy, Winter Tarragon.

Hints

- *These herbs will grow well under conditions outlined for categories 1, 2 or 3.*

Special Notes

Sunlight

Most herbs taste best if grown in full sun. However, a strong characteristic flavour can be had by exposure to as little as five hours sunshine per day.

Pruning

The lower stems of perennial herbs tend to become woody with age. To avoid this it is best to tip prune from a very early age. Frequent picking for use keeps the herb plant bushy and growing strongly. Never pick all the leaves off the plant. Leave some to sustain future growth.

Planning

If you are planning a herb garden, we suggest you divide it into separate areas for group 1, 2, and 3 plants. This will make it easier to maintain and ensure that each herb gets the best conditions for healthy growth. A variety of foliage types within each group will make your herb garden more visually appealing.

Annual Herbs

With herbs such as basil that die off in winter, it is a good idea to let a few plants go to seed in autumn. You can then collect the seeds to re-sow in spring.

Biennial herbs

Herbs such as parsley are inclined to go to seed in their second year, so a new crop should be planted every year.

Mints

These can be very invasive, so grow them in a separate area or in a container.

Location

As herbs are frequently used in cooking, it is wise to grow them close to the kitchen.

Containers

Many herbs will grow well in containers, especially in a warm, sheltered location.

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