

# FAVORITE HERBS FOR MANY USES

According to the dictionary, an **herb** is a plant that is valued for flavor, scent, or other qualities. Herbs are used in cooking, as medicines, and for spiritual purposes. Herbs may be annuals, biennials, or perennials. Annuals are plant with a one year life cycle, biennials take two years and perennials are plants that live more than two years. Many culinary herbs are perennials such as thyme, rosemary and lavender, while others are biennials such as parsley or annuals like basil. General usage differs between culinary herbs and medicinal herbs.

Medicinally, any of the parts of the plant might be considered "herbs", including leaves, roots, flowers, seeds, resin, root bark, inner bark, berries and fruit. Plants contain phytochemicals (phyto mean "plant" in Greek) that have effects on the body. Throughout history, from the Bible and other old texts, the medicinal benefits of herbs are quoted. Herbs can have differing effects on the body. For instance, some types of herbal extract, such as the extract of St. John's-Wort can be used for medical purposes to relieve depression and stress. However, large amounts of these herbs may lead to poisoning, and should be used with caution. Herbs have long been used as the basis of traditional Chinese herbal medicine, with usage dating even before the first century.

Culinary herbs are distinguished from vegetables in that they are used in small amounts and provide flavor rather than substance to food. **Spices** come from herbs and are dried seed, fruit, root, bark, leaf, or vegetative substance used in nutritionally insignificant quantities as a food additive for the purpose of flavor, color, or as a preservative that kills harmful bacteria or prevents their growth. Some plants are used as both a spice and an herb, such as dill seed and dill weed or coriander seeds and coriander leaves. In the kitchen, spices are distinguished from herbs. Herbs, such as basil or oregano, may be used fresh, and are commonly chopped into smaller pieces. Spices, however, are dried and often ground or grated into a powder. Small seeds, such as fennel and mustard seeds, are used both whole and in powder form. Also, there are some herbs such as those in the mint family that are used for culinary purposes as well as medicinal.

Herbs have been and still are used in many religions, for example in Christianity, myrrh and frankincense were used to honor kings. Certain plants are known to induce spiritual experiences and rites of passage. An example is the Cherokee Native Americans using Sage and Cedar to spiritually cleanse and smudge.

Herbs are also known amongst gardeners to be useful for pest control. Mint, spearmint, peppermint, and pennyroyal are a few of such herbs. These herbs when planted around a house's foundation can help keep unwanted critters away such as flies, mice, ants, fleas, moth and tick amongst others. They are not known to be harmful or dangerous to children or pets, or any of the house's fixtures.

An herb garden can thrive in a space as small as a windowsill. Typically herbs require only a small container, good soil, and 4 to 6 hours of sunlight a day. In fact, bunches of store-bought herbs can be maintained in vases on kitchen windowsills for days.

## Basil

Basil is also called "sweet basil" and is native to India but it is in the Mediterranean cuisines that it has reached its current high popularity. It's a member of the mint family and has that same sort of highly aromatic quality. The plant tastes somewhat like anise, with a strong, pungent, sweet smell. The green aromatic leaves are used in salads and can be used fresh or dried to add flavors or spices in stews, vegetable, poultry, meat, vinegars, pesto and pasta dishes. Basil is very sensitive to frost and will be one of the first plants to go in the fall. You can extend the season slightly by covering your plants with row covers when frost is threatened. However, if the leaves are touched by a frost covered row cover, that's enough to likely turn them black. Frequent harvesting or pinching of the leaves will keep your basil plants producing longer. You can pinch off individual leaves or take the tops off of large plants, if you need a large amount.



## Usage

- To one stick of room-temperature butter, add from 1 to 3 teaspoons finely chopped basil for spreading on breads or crackers.
- In scrambled eggs or any chopped egg salad, add between one and three teaspoons minced basil. Or sprinkle over poached eggs.
- Coarsely chop leaves and add to the cooking water for green beans, broccoli or any other green vegetable just before serving. The cooked leaves will surrender some of their flavor to the liquid.
- Finely chop the leaves and toss with flour for coating poultry, chops and vegetables. A good ratio is a tablespoon per cup of flour. Add up to two tablespoons chopped fresh basil per cup of batter.
- Mince a few large leaves and mix with softened butter and a little stock to baste poultry while roasting.
- Make a mixture in a blender of 5 or 6 large basil leaves, a couple tablespoons of room temperature butter and an ounce or two of dry white wine. Brush it on fish or chicken before baking.
- Basil and garlic are very compatible flavors. Blend 5 cloves of garlic, a couple ounces of broth or stock and about a dozen good-sized basil leaves in a processor until it's a thin, chunky paste. Brush the mixture on lamb, poultry, split zucchini, eggplant or fish filets before roasting. Baste during cooking.

Basil is often called "the tomato herb" and with good reason. The flavors seem made for each other. Here are some ways to use them together:

- Baked tomatoes - Finely chop basil, add shredded cheese, a pinch of pepper and bread crumbs in equal quantities. Cover the cut surface of the tomato. Bake at 350 for about 15 minutes.

- Tomato soup - Add a teaspoon of finely chopped basil to each bowl about 5 minutes before service.
- Tomato sauce - For pasta or pizza, coarsely chop the leaves (1/4 cup for each two cups of tomatoes) and simmer for the last 15 minutes before use.
- Tomato juice – Warm and add some very finely minced basil leaves. Chill and serve.

## Purple Basil

Purple Basil is deliciously edible, aromatic and ornamental. The plant will send up flowering spikes 2 feet tall. Cutting back the flowering stalks will keep the plant bushy. The flowers are edible and slightly milder than the leaves. Purple basil is more intensely flavored than sweet basil and therefore requires that you use a bit less in your food. The crushed leaves emit a clove-like scent. Steeping purple basil in distilled or white wine vinegar will color the vinegar a rich reddish-purple and produce a very nice flavor. This basil is also a member of the mint family, native to India.



## Usage

- Sprinkle leaves and lower across sliced tomatoes.
- Add chopped purple basil leaves to salads with yellow tomatoes for a rich color contrast and complimentary flavors.
- Drop some chopped purple basil leaves into the cooking water for cauliflower to tint it a slightly pink color and add good basil flavor.
- Steep purple basil leaves in white wine vinegar to extract both color and flavor - put leaves in a bottle, fill with the vinegar, seal and hold in a dark place for a few weeks.
- Add a few finely chopped purple basil leaves to mayonnaise or sour cream to serve with other foods. Hold overnight to get the richest color.
- Substitute purple basil for the green basil in pesto and use it as a pasta dressing or spread on grilled bread slices
- Garnish richly-flavored chilled soups like gazpacho or avocado soup with purple basil
- Add chopped purple basil leaves to marinades for poultry or pork to flavor and color the meats

## Chives

Chives are the smallest species of the onion family and are native to northern Europe and Asia. They have an oniony flavor, but it's mild and more delicate than the bulbs usually used in cooking. They have hollow, flat green leaves and produce purple flowers on a tall spike which are also edible. Chives have insect-repelling properties which can be used in gardens to control pests.



## Usage

- Add chopped chives to cream soups and cream-based sauces - a teaspoon per cup of sauce.
- Chop and add chives to scrambled eggs and omelets- a teaspoon per egg.
- Mince chives and add to cocktail sauce for shrimp - a teaspoon per 1/2 cup of sauce.
- Blend 1/2 cup cream and 1 pound of shredded white cheddar cheese until smooth, then stir in 2 tablespoons chopped chives, as a sandwich spread or dip.
- In combination with the other herbs add chives to poaching liquids for fish, creamed chicken and in the water for cooking vegetables.
- Mince chives and add to any vinaigrette salad dressing - a tablespoon per cup of liquids.
- Use long strands of chive leaves as a unique garnish for dinner plates.
- Use long strands of chive leaves to tie bundles of green beans or strips of sautéed bell pepper for a pretty presentation.

## Cilantro

Cilantro, also called "Chinese parsley", is the Spanish name for the young and tender leaves of the plant also called coriander. Both the leaves and seeds are used as flavoring agents. Cilantro is one of the most ancient herbs known. It is great for spicing up soups, salads, sauces, and pizzas and figures prominently in Mexican cuisine. The fresh herb is very fragile and should be added in the last few minutes of cooking time. Cilantro can be planted any time of year and will emerge from seed in 5 or 6 days. It is quick growing and typically is harvested in 25 to 35 days.



## Growing your own Cilantro

Choose a pot 4" deep and 8" in diameter that has drainage holes. Cover the holes with small rocks. Fill the container with soil to within 1/2" of the rim and water thoroughly. Remove 1/2 cup of the soil and set aside. Press the seeds into the mix spacing about 1/2" apart. Cover the seeds with the removed soil, which should cover the seeds about 1/4". Pat the soil. Place the pot in a sunny area where it will get at least half-day of direct sun. Keep the potting mix moist and fertilize every two weeks with liquid fertilizer.

## Usage

- Add chopped cilantro to the water for cooking rice -2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh cilantro per cup of rice added in the last five minutes of cooking.
- Add chopped cilantro to the cooking water for beans in the last 15 or 20 minutes of cooking. Use a couple tablespoons for each cup of dry beans.

- Add a generous handful of chopped cilantro to salsa mixtures and let it sit for a few hours to meld the flavors. Use a handful of cilantro to two cups of salsa.
- Chop and toss cilantro with the dressings for avocado salads and sprinkle a dusting of the chopped fresh herb for garnish.
- Brush fish filets with butter and sprinkle finely chopped cilantro and chives on them before baking.
- Add three tablespoons finely chopped cilantro to a room-temperature stick of butter and whip to mix well. Roll up in wax paper or plastic wrap to make a rod of flavored butter and chill. Slice off "coins" of the butter and put on steaks or chicken pieces still hot from the grill or broiler, or veggies just off the stove.
- Add chopped fresh cilantro, oregano, basil and thyme to a red wine-olive oil vinaigrette for a southwest-style dressing
- Add whole cilantro leaves to a bottle of red wine vinegar and store in a dark place for two or three months to extract the flavor from the herb. Strain and use in sauces, mayonnaise, bean soups and chili.

## Dill

Dill is named from an old Norse word "dilla" which means "to lull" and refers to dill water made from its seeds and still given to babies as a mild sedative. It's native to southern Europe but is found all over the world now. It has a long history going back before the ancient Egyptians who used it medicinally. This versatile herb can be used to flavor vegetables, pastas, seafood, salads and even eggs. The herb is also good to start from seed and will come through the soil in about 10 days. (Follow Cilantro growing directions.)



## Usage

- Dill and eggs are a very good combination - use chopped fresh dill in omelets, scrambled eggs, baked eggs, devilled eggs and egg salad.
- For cream sauces served with fish or poultry, add a tablespoon chopped dill per cup of sauce.
- Add chopped dill to homemade or purchased Ranch dressings - three tablespoons per cup of dressing.
- Chop dill and add to plain yogurt as a dressing for a cucumber salad. Variations can include tomatoes, sliced spring onions, chopped chives, chopped tarragon and/or capers.
- A sprig of dill in tomato juice adds a nice spiciness.
- Dill infused in cider vinegar (four tablespoons chopped dill, a tablespoon salt, and two cloves garlic to the cup of vinegar) is wonderful for making fresh 3-day refrigerator pickles - slice cucumbers across and immerse in the vinegar in the fridge for three days.

- Whip three tablespoons chopped dill into an 8-ounce package of cream cheese with two tablespoons buttermilk for a tasty dip or sandwich spread.

### Italian Parsley

Parsley is the world's most popular herb. It derives its name from the Greek word meaning "rock celery" (parsley is a relative to celery). Italian Parsley has flat leaves as opposed to the curly-leaf parsley we most often see in restaurant for plate garnishes. It is native to the Mediterranean. Every major cuisine on earth has found uses for parsley, even using it for perfume and medicinal applications as far back as 3 BC. Colonists brought it to the Americas. Italian parsley intensifies the flavors of other herbs and can be included in any dish using herbs for a fuller, richer flavor. It is used for both flavor and appearance in every category of foods except perhaps sweets. Most people do not realize that this plant is actually a storehouse of nutrients including protein, vitamins A and C, calcium, magnesium, and potassium. It has a vibrant taste and is an effective breath freshener. Crispiness is one of the things parsley does best, providing texture and color when added just before serving. Parsley holds its shape well under refrigeration, when wrapped in a damp towel. It is a biennial plant that can return to the garden year after year once it is established.



### Growing your own Italian Parsley

If you have only room to grow a single potted herb, then this is a very good choice. Start with 3 or 4 seedlings in 2" pots. Submerge the seedlings in water while still in their pots. Leave them there until the air bubbles cease. Use a 6" deep, 6" diameter pot. Cover the drainage hole with small rocks. Fill the pot with potting mix to within ½" of the rim and water mixture thoroughly. Remove the plants from the pots, scoop out a hole for each transplant deep enough for the roots to extend straight down and not bend. Place a plant in each of the holes, pat down the soil and water to fill in air pockets. Fertilize every 3 weeks with a liquid fertilizer and keep the soil thoroughly moist. Put in a place that has direct sun about 1/3 of each day. Break off the stalks to encourage leafy growth when the plants have about 2" of new foliage.

### Usage

- Mince Italian parsley and add to buttered, boiled potatoes.
- Add whole Italian parsley sprigs to tomato sauces for the last 20 minutes of cooking and remove before service.
- Combine 2 sticks butter, 3 peeled cloves garlic, 1 1/2 cups Italian parsley and salt and pepper to taste. Whirl in a processor until smooth and drizzle in 2 tablespoons olive oil. This can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 1 week. Use on grilled fish, pastas, steamed zucchini or fresh corn.
- Add Italian parsley to corn bread or stuffings for poultry - two tablespoons per cup.
- Italian parsley is an interesting vegetable - deep fry whole sprigs of Italian parsley for about 10 seconds and serve with roasted meats and stews.



- Mince Italian parsley very finely along with fresh oregano and basil and add to breadcrumbs to use for coating veal, pork or poultry scallops.
- Combine one stick of butter at room temperature with two tablespoons chopped Italian parsley and two tablespoons lemon juice to make the classic herb butter used on steaks, fish, vegetables and breads in fine restaurants.

## Lavender

Lavender is a part of the mint family and is native to the Mediterranean region. It is known for its beautiful, fragrant flowers that form on spikes rising above the foliage. The flower colors may be blue, purple or lilac. Lavender is widely grown in gardens. The flower spikes are used for dried flower arrangements and the delicate buds are used in potpourris. Placing pouches of the potpourris in clothing gives a fresh fragrance and deters moths.

English lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) yields an essential oil that can be used in balms, salves, perfumes, cosmetics, and topical applications. Essential oil of lavender has antiseptic and anti-inflammatory properties. Lavender has many uses. It soothes and helps heal insect bites, tends to repel insects, applied to the temples can soothe headaches, and dabbed on a pillow aids sleep and relaxation. Its major benefit is to treat skin burns and inflammatory conditions. It should however be used with caution since lavender oil can also be a powerful allergen.



The flowers also yield an abundance of nectar which bees turn into a high quality honey. The flowers can be candied and are sometimes used as cake decorations. Lavender flavors baked goods and desserts. It combines especially well with chocolate. Lavender flowers are occasionally blended with black, green, or herbal tea, adding a fresh, relaxing scent and flavors.

When cooking with lavender, use 1/3 the quantity of dried flowers to fresh. The key is to experiment; start out with a small amount of flowers, and add more as you go. NOTE: Adding too much lavender to your recipe will make your dish bitter. Because of the strong flavor of lavender, the secret is that a little goes a long way. Do not eat flowers from florists, nurseries, or garden centers. In many cases these flowers have been treated with pesticides and are not suitable for foods.

It is best to grow lavender from seedlings. Water it only as needed, making sure not to get the soil soggy. Fertilize in the spring and cut off old stems. Protect it in winter from sustained hard freezes.

## Usage

- The lavender flowers add a beautiful color to salads.
- Use lavender blossoms to make lavender ice cream with a vanilla custard base.
- Lavender can also be substituted for rosemary in many bread recipes.
- The flowers can be put in sugar and sealed tightly for a couple of weeks then the sugar can be substituted for ordinary sugar for a cake, buns or custards.
- Grind the lavender in an herb or coffee grinder or mash them with mortar and pestle.

- The spikes and leaves of lavender can be used in most dishes in place of rosemary in most recipes. Use the spikes or stems for making fruit or shrimp kabobs. Just place your favorite fruit on the stems and grill.
- Flowers look beautiful and taste good too in a glass of champagne, with chocolate cake, or as a garnish for sorbets or ice creams.
- Lavender lends itself to savory dishes also, from hearty stews to wine-reduced sauces.
- Diminutive blooms add a mysterious scent to custards, flans or sorbets.

## Mint

Mint is probably the most ancient of the herbs. It was named by Greeks after a mythical character called Menthe. The sturdy mint plant, covered with furred leaves, grows and multiplies rapidly. It is therefore best to grow it within the confines of a container. Mint was originally used as a medicinal herb to treat stomach ache and chest pains, and it is commonly used in the form of tea as a home remedy to help alleviate stomach pain. The strong, sharp flavor and scent of mint is sometimes used as a mild decongestant for illnesses such as the common cold. Mint oil is also used as an environmentally-friendly insecticide for its ability to kill some common pests like wasps, hornets, ants and cockroaches. The leaves have a pleasant warm, fresh, aromatic, sweet flavor with a cool aftertaste. Mint leaves are used in stir-fried vegetables, teas, jellies, syrups, candies, and ice creams. It is one of the few herbs used in sweets.



## Usage

- Finely chop two teaspoons mint and add to chocolate pudding recipes that use about two cups milk. Increase or decrease the amount of mint to suit your recipe.
- Add a few mint leaves to the cooking water for peas and other fresh beans.
- Chop a tablespoon of mint and add to lamb stew - for one to two pounds of meat.
- Steep a cup of mint leaves in a pint of cider vinegar for two weeks. Strain and add 2 cups honey to make a sauce for fruit compotes, waffles and pancakes, ice cream, and to add to iced tea.
- Chop two or three tablespoons mint leaves and stir into a cup of hot pepper jelly. Mix with cream cheese for a hot and cold dip or spread.
- Use whole mint sprigs to garnish fruit salads, melon slices, berries in cream and strawberry shortcakes.
- Mix 3 tablespoons chopped mint leaves and a tablespoon chopped chives with a cup of yogurt as a dressing for peeled and sliced cucumbers.



- Add mint leaves to any cooked fruit - chop a few leaves and mix with apples to be sautéed, tuck a sprig or two in home-canned fruit like peaches and plums.

## Oregano

Oregano is a member of the mint family and is related to basil. Native to southern Europe, it has spread all around the Mediterranean and become important to all the cuisines of the region. It has a warm and slightly bitter taste. Oregano is intensely flavored but still not overwhelming to other herbs. It is the leaves that are used in cooking, and the dried herb is often more flavorful than the fresh. The dish most commonly associated with oregano is pizza. Oregano is prone to sprawling. The more the shoots are cut, the bushier the plant will become. Hippocrates, the father of medicine, used oregano as an antiseptic as well as a cure for stomach and respiratory ailments. It is strongly sedative and should not be taken in large doses, though mild teas have a soothing effect and aid restful sleep.



## Usage

- Add chopped oregano leaves to tomato sauces for pastas, pizza and for dipping - two tablespoons per cup of tomatoes.
- Add oregano at the very end of cooking mushrooms - a tablespoon per cup of cooked mushrooms.
- Finely mince a couple tablespoons each of oregano, basil, thyme, and parsley. Add to 1/4 cup Parmesan cheese, and mix with two cups of breadcrumbs - to coat veal, poultry, fish, eggplant slices or as a topping for casseroles.
- Slice peppers and onions and gently fry in olive oil - add a tablespoon chopped oregano for each onion near the end of cooking.
- Put several sprigs of oregano in a pint bottle of vinegar and let steep for a month or more in a dark place to use as part of a salad dressing with olive oil.
- Make a basic pizza with tomato sauce and mozzarella cheese as toppings and spread a good handful of whole oregano leaves over top and finish with more mozzarella and some grated Parmesan.
- Chop together two tablespoonfuls each oregano, basil, rosemary, thyme and parsley and add to two cups of any salad dressing.
- Tuck sprigs of oregano under the skin of chickens to be roasted or in the cavity of any fish to be baked.

## Rosemary

Rosemary is a woody, herb with fragrant evergreen needle-like leaves. It is a member of the mint family. Rosemary is an evergreen, perennial shrub that originated near the Mediterranean

Sea and still grows wild all around it to this day. Its name means "dew of the sea" in Latin. It is considered easy to grow for beginner gardeners, and is pest-resistant. The plant is easily pruned into shapes and has been used for topiary. When grown in pots, it is best kept trimmed to stop it getting straggly and unsightly, though when grown in a garden, rosemary can grow quite large and still be attractive. It can be propagated from an existing plant by clipping a shoot 4–6 inches long, stripping a few leaves from the bottom, and planting it directly into soil. The fresh or dried leaves have a bitter, astringent taste and are highly aromatic. In times past, rosemary was used to flavor wine and the blue flowers were candied and eaten as a confection. Rosemary is extremely high in iron, calcium, and Vitamin B6. The results of a study suggest that carnosic acid, found in rosemary, may shield the brain from free radicals, lowering the risk of strokes and neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's and Lou Gehrig's. Whenever your brain is tired, inhale rosemary oil to remove boredom and get fresh mental energy. The scent of the oil gives relief from throat congestion. The oil is used in treating respiratory allergies, cold, sore throat and flu. Since rosemary oil is antiseptic it is effective for respiratory infections as well. Put a few drop of the essential oil in a sauce pan, heat and inhale.



## Usage

- Olive oil, walnut oil, sunflower oil, or any other high-quality vegetable oil can be flavored with fresh herbs. Rosemary oil is superb for marinating meats and vegetables.
- Put a few sprigs of rosemary in a bottle of honey or marmalade and let it infuse for a month or two in a dark place. Discard the herb, stir and use the sweet as you normally would.
- Use the stiff rosemary sprigs to skewer shrimp, pieces of pork, poultry or lamb for grilling - they add a wonderful flavor. Slip off the leaves and save for other uses.
- Finely chop rosemary leaves and add to bread dough - two tablespoons herbs for each 4 cups of flour.
- Rosemary can be used in two different ways with roasted meats. Chop the leaves and rub on meats or lay a few sprigs on top and a few under the meat in the roasting pan.
- Drop a few sprigs of rosemary into the water for poaching fish or eggs.
- Put a few sprigs of rosemary on coals when doing outdoor-grilled meats.
- Add a couple sprigs to cooking water for potatoes, rice and pasta, especially when serving with poultry or fish.
- Use a sprig of rosemary as a stirrer for Bloody Mary's or in plain tomato juice.

## Sage

Sage is a small perennial evergreen shrub, with woody stems and typically grayish leaves, and blue to purplish flowers. It is a member of the mint family. It is native to the Mediterranean region and commonly grown as a kitchen and medicinal herb or as an ornamental garden plant. The Latin name for sage, *salvia*, means "to heal". The strongest active constituents of Sage are within its essential oil. Sage essential oil is anti-viral, bactericidal, antiseptic, and a decongestant. The different varieties of sage display leaf colors of red, purple, gold, green and cream. A sage plant will quickly grow to a foot or more. It produces long spikes with purple blossoms that attract butterflies, bees and hummingbirds. Sage needs little water once it is started and makes the perfect plant for those places where water is scarce. It is one of the more aromatic of the popular herbs and sets off the flavors of other strongly flavored foods well. Sage is one of the dominant flavors in sausage-making and poultry stuffings.



## Usage

- Alternate sage leaves with cubes of meat and vegetables on skewers when making shish-kabobs.
- Heat 1/2 stick of butter in a skillet and add two tablespoons chopped sage and toss to cover. Warm through and serve over pasta or mixed into rice.
- Slide a few sprigs of sage under the skin of chickens and turkeys top be roasted. Put a few in the cavity, as well.
- Combine two tablespoons chopped sage with 8-ounces of cream cheese and three or four tablespoons white wine as a light spread or dip.
- When frying or sautéing onions adding a few sage leaves to the pan intensifies the richness of the onion flavor.
- Mince a couple tablespoons sage leaves and add to bean-pots near the end of cooking - likewise add to chili and other hearty soups and stews.
- Add two or three tablespoons finely chopped sage to a cup of flour for coating chicken for frying or baking.
- Mix two tablespoons finely chopped sage to one stick of butter and whip thoroughly. Roll in wax paper or plastic wrap and chill. Slice off small "coins" and put on steaks or chicken pieces immediately.

## Savory

Savory is native to warm temperate regions and may be annual or perennial. Savorys are low-growing herbs and sub-shrubs. The flowers form in whorls on the stem and are white to pale pink-violet. Savory may be grown purely for ornamental purposes. Both summer savory and winter savory are used to flavor food. The former is preferred by cooks but as an annual is only available in summer; winter savory is an evergreen perennial most commonly



used as a seasoning for green vegetables. Savory's special affinity is for beans. Use summer savory, with its more delicate flavor, for tender baby green beans, and winter savory to enhance dried beans and lentils. Summer savory is the most delicate of the varieties, both in taste and in character. The slender pale green leaves grow sparsely along delicate reddish stems. The stems themselves are square in shape, letting us know that they are related to the mint family. This is also evident in the aroma of the summer savory: a mixture reminiscent of both mint and thyme. Winter savory is a coarser variety. Often used as a hedging plant in knot gardens of the Tudor era, it is a dense perennial shrub that grows to a height of 15 inches in well drained soil and full sun. The plant produces fragrant white to lilac colored blossoms that are attractive to bees. The leaves of winter savory are bright green, narrow, and tough. They are best used for dishes that require long cooking, such as stews, or added to the water when cooking dried beans so that there is enough heat and moisture to break them down. This not only releases the flavorful oils, but also softens the leaves so that they are edible. Both of these varieties of savory have a peppery bite to them, although the summer savory is milder. It has been suggested to use this herb as a seasoning for salt-free diets as the strong flavor makes food more appealing. Savory's popularity as a healing herb is nothing new. It has long been reputed to be a general tonic to the digestive tract, as well as a powerful antiseptic. Branches of the herb were tossed on the fire to create an aromatic disinfectant. Even today, because of its pungent oils, it is commonly used in toothpaste and soaps.

## Usage

- Europeans call it the bean herb because of its sympathetic flavor. Add a tablespoon to the cooking water and add the same amount again at the very end of cooking beans, peas, lentils, limas, and other dried beans.
- Add a tablespoon of savory to each pound of ground beef for burgers, meat loaf any formed meat dish.
- Mince savory and toss with bread cubes for stuffing or to use as croutons with salads.
- Put sprigs of savory in vinegar and let steep for a month or more in a dark place then remove the herbs. Use as part of a salad dressing or as a marinade for red meats and wild game by diluting with three parts water, stock, juice or your favorite wines.
- Add a couple tablespoons finely chopped savory to cream and cheese dishes like macaroni and cheese, cheese-mashed potatoes, cheese fondue, green vegetables with cheese sauce and even hot nacho cheese for dipping.
- Sprinkle finely chopped savory over fish or chicken to be oven-baked after brushing with oil or butter.
- Add coarsely chopped savory to fish soups and chowders - a tablespoon per portion.
- Add a few whole savory leaves to tomato soups and sauces near the end of cooking. Garnish soups with whole leaves at service.

## Thyme

Thyme has an ancient history. The Egyptians used thyme for embalming. The Greeks used it in their baths and burnt it as incense in their temples, believing that thyme was a source of courage. It was thought that the spread of thyme throughout Europe was thanks to the Romans, as they used it to purify their rooms and to "give an aromatic flavor to cheese and liqueurs". It's a perennial plant in the mint family and is still being used to flavor a wide range of foods from cheese to liqueurs. Thyme is often used to flavor meats, soups and stews. While flavorful, it does not overpower and blends well with other herbs and spices. Depending on how it is used in a dish, the whole sprig may be used or the leaves removed and the stems discarded. Usually when a recipe specifies 'bunch' or 'sprig' it means the whole form; when it specifies spoons it means the leaves. It is perfectly acceptable to substitute dried for whole thyme. Leaves may be removed from stems either by scraping with the back of a knife, or by pulling through the fingers or tines of a fork. Leaves are often chopped. Thyme is slow to release its flavors so it is usually added early in the cooking process. Before the advent of modern antibiotics, it was used to medicate bandages. A tea made by infusing the herb in water can be used for cough and bronchitis. There are many varieties of thyme, including some that can be clipped into bush form and some that have exotic flavors such as caraway and orange. For all-around satisfaction in all growing conditions, common thyme is recommended.



- Sauté three tablespoons thyme leaves in two tablespoons butter to pour over Brussels sprouts, green beans or egg noodles.
- Strip some leaves from the stems and drop into mushrooms while they sauté. Use a tablespoon per pound of mushrooms.
- Chop thyme and add to flour for dredging chicken for frying. Use a tablespoon per cup of flour.
- Chop coarsely and add a teaspoon or two of thyme to a recipe for a dozen biscuits. Adjust the quantity according to the different recipes.
- Add a teaspoon of thyme leaves per cup of clam chowder just before service.
- Add three or four tablespoons of thyme leaves to two cups of hot chicken broth. Remove from the heat, cover and let steep for 1 hour. Strain and chill. Use that broth to add to the water to cook rice and pasta. Mix 1/2 cup vinegar, a cup of the broth and 1/2 cup oil for a low-fat salad dressing. Shake or whisk and pour over salads. Refrigerated, it will keep for a week.
- Add a tablespoon of finely minced thyme leaves and a tablespoon chopped garlic chives to the pot when mashing up to two pounds of potatoes. Increase or decrease the amounts according to your recipe quantities.
- Add the leaves from a good-sized sprig of thyme to beans while they simmer - about 15 minutes from the end of cooking. Pick up some beans on a spoon and blow on them. If the skin breaks open, that's the time to add the herbs. The beans are within minutes of being done.



## Below the ground herbs

### Garlic

Garlic is a perennial plant that is widely cultivated as one of the most common kitchen herbs. The garlic bulb is compound, consisting of individual bulbs or cloves, enclosed together in a white skin. Bulbs are gathered in the fall. Garlic stimulates the activity of the digestive organs and therefore relieves various problems associated with poor digestion. As an expectorant it is useful for chronic bronchitis. Garlic also regularizes the action of the liver and the gall bladder. It is helpful for all intestinal infections. Garlic appears to lower blood pressure and helps to counteract arteriosclerosis. Once you have eaten garlic, there are a number of things that you can do to reduce your garlic breath. Chew on a few sprigs of fresh parsley, for example. Another option is to chew on fresh mint or to drink a large glass of hot mint tea. Also, be sure to give your teeth a good brushing and floss as well.



### Ginger

Ginger is a tuber that is consumed whole as a delicacy, medicine, or spice. It is a perennial plant indigenous to tropical Asia. The aromatic, knotty rootstock is thick, fibrous and whitish or buff-colored. Young ginger rhizomes are juicy and fleshy with a very mild taste. They are often pickled in vinegar or sherry as a snack or just cooked as an ingredient in many dishes. They can also be stewed in boiling water to make ginger tea, to which honey is often added; sliced orange or lemon fruit may also be added. Mature ginger roots are fibrous and nearly dry. The juice from old ginger roots is often used as a spice in Indian recipes and Chinese cuisine to flavor dishes such as seafood or goat meat and vegetarian cuisine. Fresh ginger can be substituted for ground ginger at a ratio of 6 to 1, although the flavors of fresh and dried ginger are somewhat different. Ginger can also be made into candy. Powdered dry ginger root is typically used as a flavoring for recipes such as gingerbread, cookies, crackers and cake, ginger ale, and ginger beer. Hot ginger tea or tincture can promote cleansing of the body through perspiration. The tea can also be used to settle an upset stomach and chewing on the rootstock can soothe a sore throat. Ginger has been found effective in multiple studies for treating nausea caused by seasickness, morning sickness and chemotherapy. Fresh ginger may be peeled before being eaten. For storage, the ginger can be placed in a plastic bag and refrigerated or frozen for longer-term storage.



### Turmeric

Turmeric is a perennial herb plant of the ginger family. This warm and aromatic spice with bitter undertones is used extensively in Southeast Asian and Middle-Eastern cuisines. In Indian cuisine turmeric is added to nearly every dish. Turmeric is an ancient spice, native to Indonesia and India, where it has been harvested for more than 5000 years. It needs temperatures between 68°F and 86°F, and a considerable amount of annual rainfall to thrive. Plants are gathered annually for their rhizomes, and re-seeded from some of those rhizomes in the following season. Although usually used in its dried, powdered form, turmeric is also used fresh, much like ginger. Turmeric has recently become popular in Western cultures. Much of its recent popularity is owed to the recent research that has highlighted its therapeutic properties. A new study has found that turmeric could be an effective enhancer of an enzyme that protects the brain against oxidative conditions. This

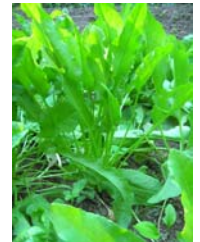




research is an important first step in determining whether turmeric could be used as a preventive agent to help reduce the progression of chronic and age associated neurodegenerative disorders, such as Alzheimer's disease. Turmeric has both anti-oxidant and anti-inflammatory properties. Research has shown that turmeric has other health benefits- it aids digestion, helps fight infection and guards against heart attacks. A large pinch of turmeric powder adds an orange-yellow hue to salad dressings. It is also a great spice to complement in recipes that use rice, lentils and dry beans.

### Less Common Herbs

Calendula has, for centuries, been used commonly in cooking, dyes, and magic, but during the twentieth century its culinary qualities have been overlooked. Add calendula petals to salads and pasta dishes.



Chamomile is a common name for several daisy-like plants. These plants are best known for their ability to be made into a tea which is commonly used to help with sleep and is often served with either honey or lemon. The plant is a low growing plant found wild in the British Isles. It has a powerful soothing and sedative effect which is harmless.



Lemon Balm is a perennial herb in the mint family which is native to southern Europe and the Mediterranean region. The leaves have a gentle lemon scent. At the end of the summer, small white flowers full of nectar appear which attracts bees. Lemon Balm grows in clumps and spreads vegetatively as well as by seed. Lemon balm is often used as a flavoring in ice cream and herbal teas, both hot and iced, often in combination with other herbs such as spearmint. It is also frequently paired with fruit dishes or candies. For some folks, the crushed leaves, when rubbed on the skin, act as a repellent for mosquitoes.



Lemon Grass is native to Southeast Asia and grows best in cooler tropical areas. The plant is prized for its lemon flavor and aroma. Only recently has it become popular in American kitchens.



Salad Burnet is perennial herb that is drought-tolerant, and grows all year around. It is used as an ingredient in both salads and dressings, having a flavor described as "light cucumber" and is considered interchangeable with mint leaves in some recipes, depending on the intended effect. Typically, the youngest leaves are used, as they tend to become bitter as they age. It was brought to the New World with the first English colonists, even getting special mention by Thomas Jefferson.



Sorrel is very popular in French cooking and has a lightly tart flavor. Native to Europe, sorrel is used both as a vegetable and as an aromatic herb. It has sword-shaped edible, lemony leaves often used in sauces, and tiny ones add a sharp tang to salads. As sorrel has a tendency to spread and may become invasive, it should be planted in pot, growing 2 or 3 plants in a container.



Spicy Basil is probably the best of the bush basil. It is a tidy, compact plant absolutely covered with small fragrant leaves. Being a compact basil it is great in the landscape as a summer border or as a container plant. It grows into a uniform 8-10 inch high mounds that reach 12 inches across. Use the leaves of



this flavorful variety just as you would any other sweet basil. Its spicy basil flavor is a compliment to any tomato dish.

Stevia is an herb native to subtropical and tropical regions from western North America to South America. Commonly known as **sweetleaf**, **sweet leaf**, **sugarleaf**, or simply **stevia**, it is widely grown for its sweet leaves. As a sweetener and sugar substitute, stevia's taste has a longer duration than that of sugar, although some of its extracts may have a bitter aftertaste at high concentrations. Because its extracts have up to 300 times the sweetness of sugar, stevia has garnered attention with the rise in demand for low-carbohydrate, low-sugar food alternatives. Medical research has also shown possible benefits of stevia in treating obesity and high blood pressure. Stevia has a negligible effect on blood glucose, and therefore is an attractive natural sweetener to people on carbohydrate-controlled diets. Health concerns and political controversies have limited stevia's availability in many countries; for example, the United States banned it in the early 1990s unless labeled as a supplement, but in 2008 approved it as a food additive. Stevia is widely used as a sweetener in Japan, South America, Switzerland, Australia, New Zealand and parts of Asia.



Tarragon comes from the Spanish "tarragon" which comes from the Greek word for "little dragon" in reference to tarragon's snaky-looking roots. It is native to Asia and is a perennial with very highly aromatic leaves. It's the major flavoring agent in the classic Béarnaise sauce. Tarragon's sweet citrus taste is easily captured and preserved in vinegars. Use tarragon vinegar for fish and vegetable dishes, to flavor mayonnaise and to make vinaigrette for juicy summer tomatoes.



Thai Basil, also known as Anise/Licorice Basil, has a more assertive taste than many other sweet basil. The herb has small leaves, purple stems and a subtle licorice or mint flavor. It is used as a condiment in Thai and Vietnamese dishes. Its leaves are a deep green, and are smaller than sweet basil. They grow on purplish stems, topped with pretty, reddish purple flower buds. Both leaves and edible flowers are sweetly perfumed with a mix of a distinctly basil scent and that of anise or licorice.



## Flower Herbs

Nasturtiums are easy to grow from seed and quick to develop beautiful edible blossoms which have a peppery taste that makes them a good salad ingredient. The spicy, bittersweet leaves of the plant are also edible. The flowers, crushed with butter, salt and pepper, make a flavorful spread for fish and steaks.



Violets planted in rich, moist soil quickly produce a carpet of green and purple. Use fresh violets to flavor mixed green salads or creamy vanilla custard. As with all edible plants, be certain they have not been treated with a harmful spray.



## Extra Notes

Soil is a mix of organic matter and three soil particles: sand, silt, and clay. A good loamy soil is about 60% sand, 20% silt, and 20% clay. Most soils are less than 5 percent organic matter. Commercial potting mixes are low in sand and high in organic matter. Adding sand greatly increase their quality.

Organic fertilizers are recommended. For most herbs, especially container herbs, an all-purpose or fish-emulsion liquid fertilizer will adequately supply needed nutrients. Yellow leaves are often symptomatic of a nitrogen deficiency and may indicate that it is time to add fertilizer.

There are several reasons to consider growing selected herbs in outdoor pots, even when you have plenty of garden area. Having potted herbs outside enriches the landscape and offers the opportunity to grow herbs that are too invasive (like mint and sorrel) for the garden or too delicate to survive outside during the winter. Herbs with similar growing requirements can be planted together in the same pot, or their individual pots can be kept in the same garden location to create planting visuals. In addition, with pots, herbs that could not survive the winter in the ground can be moved in and out of the weather.

In just a few square feet of ground, you can plant an herb garden with a few perennials, permanent herbs that will give you pleasure season after season. You can also mix in 2 or 3 annual herbs and reseed again the following year. As long as your little plot receives at least a half –day of sun and you water, weed, and tend it with reasonable faithfulness, you can have a successful harvest. As you choose your herbs, keep in mind the kind of cooking you do, along with the colors and appearance of the plants. Your garden should please you visually when you tend it and its harvest should please you in the kitchen.

The Mediterranean herbs are rosemary, sage, oregano, and thyme. Although these plants differ in taste and appearance, all are wood-stemmed perennials that flourish in one climate and thus can be grown together in the same container. Select a container that is 24" in diameter and 18" deep. Cover the drainage holes with small rocks. Submerge a mixture of 6 plants (2" – 4" starting pots) in a bucket of water until air bubbles cease. Fill the container with a blend of potting mix and sand. Water the soil until thoroughly moist. Scoop out 6 holes, remove the plants and root balls from their pots and place them in the holes. Pat the surface smooth and water to fill in the air pockets. Keep the mix moist, but not soggy, during the first spring and summer of growth. Place the container in a spot that gets at least  $\frac{3}{4}$  to a full day of direct sun. Fertilize about 3 weeks after planting and again each spring. Harvest when the plant shows at least 2" of new growth. Cut away dead growth from the sage and oregano. Train the trailing rosemary to grow downward, covering container with a curtain of leaves and tiny blue flowers.

**A FRESH CUT GARDEN** - If growing herbs is not possible then purchase fresh herbs at you grocery store. Select only fresh, healthy-looking herbs with no dark spots or yellowing. Herbs with woody stems such as sage, thyme, rosemary and oregano are the longest lasting. Dill, basil and mint last only a few days. After purchasing the herbs, remove the wire twist and put each bunch of herbs in its own glass. Line the glasses on the windowsill in indirect sunlight. Change water daily and remove decaying leaves.