



Project List:

Herbs

Herbs of course bring unique flavors to cooking, but many have aromatherapeutic, medicinal, and decorative uses. Herbs yield their best benefits when grown organically, and most are perennials that can be grown with minimal care, even in small spaces. This list will enable you to grow them successfully and reap their many rewards!

FIRST SEASON

SITE: Watch the sun: *For most herbs, at least a half-day of morning sun with protection from hot, afternoon exposures and any reflected heat is ideal*, though many require more shade. Amend the soil and plant directly, or use **raised beds**, which provide increased drainage. Herbs do well in **containers**, and many types can be grown in a small space. For culinary use, make the herbs easily accessible to the kitchen. For pollinator and wildscaping benefits, grow your herbs around the outside perimeter or near vegetables. You can also easily bring herbs into the landscape: for instance, rosemary is a tough, drought tolerant evergreen shrub for dry areas.

SOIL: Herbs are closely related to plants that grow naturally in the wild, and are used to lean, gravelly soils with very good drainage and low amounts of organic matter and fertilizer. For **containers**, most will do well in terra-cotta pots with **Vital Earth Potting Soil** or **Peace Pipe Potting Mix**. For herbs that like drier conditions such as lavender, add **lava sand** or **green sand** to this. Site these in gravelly soils in drier locations with additional sun. Often, corners of raised beds work well. Our **NHG Organic Potting Soil** is best suited for annual or tropical herbs that need more moisture, such as basil. For **raised beds** or in-ground situations, use a ready-made mix or your own compost and recipe. A Garden Advisor can help with ratios and quantities of these and other amendments.

YOUR SOIL CHECKLIST

☐ **Soil Mix** - *(for raised beds or containers)*

Mayer Raised Bed & Garden _____

Mayer Peace Pipe Potting Mix (6 qt) _____

Vital Earth Potting Soil _____

NHG Organic Potting Soil _____

☐ **Amendments** - *(as the top layer for raised beds; omit Topsoil if planting in-ground)*

Mayer Materials Topsoil _____

Mayer Materials Rejuvenate _____

Vital Earth Organic Compost _____

☐ **Expanded Shale** - *(add 1-2" or more to increase drainage, aerate, & break up soils)* _____

☐ **Fertilizer** - Herbs need little fertilizer. Add organic food to mixes at 1-2 lbs per 100 sq ft:

Espoma Bio-tone Starter Plus _____

Espoma Garden-tone _____

Thoroughly blend your chosen materials together, moisten it as needed, and plant.

☐ **Mulch** - For most herbs, water first, then add a 3 - 4" layer of mulch, such as **pine straw**, **cedar**, or **hardwood**. Afterward, lightly water again. Do not mulch areas to be seeded. For herbs like lavender that prefer drier conditions, try pebbles, rocks, gravel, or **expanded shale** to reduce watering and humidity levels. Apply at least 1" after planting.

Additional Amendments for Herbs

☐ **Liquid Seaweed**

Supplies trace nutrients and a good pest repellent; apply as a drench or spray

☐ **Texas Greensand**

Adds potassium, iron and other trace nutrients and acts as a soil conditioner & water holder

☐ **Lava Sand**

Greatly improves drainage, moisture holding capacity and root efficiency; great for lavender

☐ **Horticultural Corn Meal**

Increases soil quality and helps to prevent fungal diseases

***Remember—** Unlike growing vegetables, you will only need small amounts of added nutrients and minerals to produce the best results when growing herbs. Consult a Garden Advisor for rates.*

SECOND SEASON & THEREAFTER

- Be patient; as your soil improves, things will get better over time! Watch for earthworms to appear as the soil ages and the nutrients become more available to plants.
- In raised beds, it is normal for the soil to settle and the organic matter to be used up by the plants each season. Add additional prepared **soil mix** or your blended **amendments**, **fertilize** again, moisten and turn prior to starting the next planting season. If a larger volume is needed, include **Topsoil**. See a Garden Advisor for rates.
- Unless you are seeding, be sure to maintain the **mulch** layer at all times.
- Monitor your growing garden carefully—daily if possible—to catch potential pest and disease problems early and maximize your harvests. Contact us for assistance with a diagnosis.

SELECTION: With so many flavors and aromas to choose from, choose the herbs that you know you will use first and add other varieties later to expand your cooking, therapy, or crafting possibilities. If harvested often, several herbs can be combined even in small containers and still have enough for use. Should space allow, plan for 1-2 additional plants of each kind to dedicate them for any wildscaping benefits. In larger spaces, if herbs can be allowed to go to seed (or 'bolt'), many herbs can be left to provide food for wildlife or serve as a potential seed source for sowing the next planting.

TIMING: *We've broadly grouped all our herbs and vegetables into two groups: warm and cool seasons.* This will tell you not only the herb's main growing period, but also the time of the year in which it is typically available in transplant form. In addition, many herbs can also be easily grown from seed.

WARM SEASON—These are the common herbs that we know that do most of their growing and are harvested from April through October, including thymes and oregano. Tropical herbs such as basil will not tolerate temperatures lower than about 45 degrees f. Seeded, these plants are typically started after the chance of any frosts. In containers, herbs like basil can be brought indoors for the winter.

COOL SEASON— Growing from October through about April, these herbs are grown and harvested before it gets especially warm and are best kept outdoors. Examples are cilantro, fennel, and parsley. As temperatures rise, container-grown plants can be moved to the north or east sides to extend harvests by exposing them less to reflected heat.

PREP: Fertilize new soils with **Espoma's Garden-tone** to make nutrients better available to the new plantings. Do not over-fertilize herbs, as it can cause rank growth and destroy subtle differences in aroma and flavor concentration. Add organic **compost** to existing soils to increase the organic matter and drainage. **Espoma's Bio-tone Starter Plus** is highly recommended to start plants faster and to reduce transplant shock.

PLANT: Remember to soak the rootball in a **Root Stimulator** solution or least in water prior to planting. All plants should be set in the soil at the original soil level or slightly higher to promote better drainage.

CULTURE: Herbs need less fertilizing—feed sparingly, if at all. A seasonal, side-dressing with organic compost in spring and fall combined with a mild, organic fertilizer is a good approach for herbs. *Remember, plants like these—grown for edible leaves and flowers—are best grown organically.* Dry, inorganic mulches such as pebbles, gravels, and small stones work well on herbs such as lavender and rosemary which appreciate dryness at their base and lower humidity. As herbs mature and establish, many will need less water.

HERBS INDOORS: Herbs grown indoors will be slightly tricky to maintain, and many will tolerate indoor pot culture for only 1-2 years, but it is possible to keep several varieties close by, especially in winter when their pungent flavors and aromas are so welcome in cooking.

BEST INDOOR HERBS

Aloe Vera

Basil

Chives

Ginger

Marjoram

Mint

Oregano

Parsley

Sage

Winter Savory

INDOOR GROWING TIPS

- Bright, southwest-facing windows are ideal, and plants will appreciate the nighttime temperature drops. Remember to turn plants often to promote even growth. Plants will do better if you're able to add artificial lighting to increase light levels.
- Most do best in terra cotta pots with their good breathability and drainage. Be sure to use a potting mix, not native soil, and use a general purpose, indoor plant food at half strength to feed.
- Keep them cooler— 65 degrees during the day and 55-60 degrees at night is best. Air circulation is vitally important for herb health. Keep air moving, but avoid cold blasts from open doors or heated air from vents.
- Tip-prune plants often to keep them actively growing, and as with all plants grown indoors, keep a sharp eye out for pests and diseases, identifying and treating them as early as possible.

HARVEST: The best time to harvest is in the morning after any dew dries, which maximizes flavors and inhibits mold. Harvest new plants only lightly until they establish. Carefully snip flowers or leaves from the newest, most tender growth, cleaning tools between different herbs and after cutting to avoid mixing of flavors or transmitting disease. Small bouquets, cut and placed in an inch or so of water in a tall container and then covered with loose plastic wrap and placed on a kitchen counter or refrigerated, are good for short-term storage and easy access. Basil, cilantro, parsley, and thyme keep well this way.

HERB CLASSIFICATIONS

Annual: These herbs are grown in one season or year, either cool or warm; some are classified as reseeding such as Basil.

Biennial: This unusual type grows for typically 2 years, going to seed the second; and may become a short lived perennial; like dill or fennel.

Perennial: These are most herbs for us in Texas; going to the ground in winter (not 'dies'); and then returning reliably for several years; such as oregano (a 'true' perennial).

Evergreen Perennial: These herbs keep most of their leaves year-round, like most thymes, lavender and rosemary. Many will tolerate cold weather.

Tender Perennial: A weather or location dependent herb, these may or may not freeze completely to the ground and are good for containers for easier winter protection, such as lemon verbena.

Tropical: These grow only in warm periods in temperatures greater than 45 degrees. These are ideal as container houseplants to move indoors, such as aloe.

PLANTS WITH EDIBLE FLOWERS

Aloe vera
Althea
Apple
Arugula
Basil
Begonia
Borage
Broccoli
Calendula
Chicory
Chives
Clover
Coriander
Dill
Dandelion
Daylily
Elderberry
English Daisy
Fennel
Hyssop
Lavender
Lemon

Lilac
Mint
Monarda
Mums
Mustard
Okra
Oregano
Peas (*not sweet*)
Pineapple Sage
Radish
Redbud
Roses (*petals*)
Rosemary
Scented Geraniums
Society Garlic
Sweet Woodruff
Squash
Thyme
Turk's Cap
Violet
Winter Savory
Yucca (*petals*)

Note: For the use of edible flowers, herbs should only be grown organically and always rinsed thoroughly prior to use.

COMMON CULINARY HERBS

Basic herbs that belong in every kitchen. Start here.

Basil
Spearmint
Italian Oregano
Italian Parsley
Rosemary
Thyme

Beyond the basics, try these next:

Bay Leaf
Cilantro
Dill
Fennel
Garlic / Onion Chives
Sage

HERBS FOR POLLINATORS

Allowed to bloom, many herbs are very popular nectar sources for many species of bees, birds, butterflies, and moths:

Basil
Lavender
Lemon Balm
Mexican Mint Marigold
Oregano
Rosemary
Sage

Larval sources of swallowtail butterfly caterpillars:

Parsley, Dill, Fennel, Rue

Less well known, but good pollinator attractors:

Chervil, Cilantro, Lovage

PRESERVING:

- *Drying:* Most woody herbs, such as oregano, rosemary, and thyme. This can be simply hanging in a cool, dry, dust-free space, or it can be done in the refrigerator, an oven, a microwave, or commercial dryer.
- *To dry:* Gather a handful of stems and leaves, cut as a bunch, and wrap a rubber band tightly around the base. Label and hang upside down in an airy spot away from direct sun to dry. Keep for up to one year.
- *To store:* When completely dry, crumble leaves and store in clean glass jars away from heat and light.
- *Freezing:* Best for any larger, tender leaves, such as basil, chives, and parsley. Freeze in water or extra virgin olive oil, or add to butters and freeze. Ice cube trays are good for preserving herbs that may be out of season like basil, so they can be added to winter soups and stews.
- *To freeze herbs:* Remove leaves such as sage and basil from their stems first. Cut into short sprigs, thyme and dill will freeze well.
- *To preserve the best flavor:* Always store your herbs away from the heat of cooking areas. Freeze herbs for a maximum of 6-8 months only. If used after this period, additional amounts will be needed for flavor. Herb vinegars are wonderful, and an ideal method to preserve your own herb blends for longer periods.

COOKING:

- *How much to use:* A general guideline is to use 2 teaspoons of fresh herbs for 4 servings of a recipe. As the drying process concentrates flavors, for dried herbs use half as much. If herbs are to be added to uncooked foods such as dressings, make sure to taste them first, as the lack of heat may not sufficiently release the plant's flavors and more herbs might be required.
- *To prep fresh herbs:* Rinse herbs in a sink bath or under running water and pat dry with towels. Rub larger, whole-leaf herbs between your hands to bring essential oils to the surface, then mince with a knife, chiffonade, or cut with scissors. Larger batches of herbs can be briefly pulsed in a food processor.
- *Blanching and cooling:* This is seldomly done with herbs, as the process can subdue flavors and aromas. However, basil can be blanched in order to preserve a greener color, though the flavor will diminish.

MAINTENANCE:

- Harvest leafy, herbaceous herbs like basil often, and remove any developing flower spikes to promote new growth. Flower heads can be left to feed pollinators, or allowed to go to seed.
- Harvest thyme often during the growing season, or prune back established plants to keep fresh growth coming, otherwise thyme will tend to 'play out', become woodier, and begin to lose vigor.
- Fertilize after these early spring and late summer cutbacks. Side-dress with organic compost to rejuvenate the soil, and top-off mulch levels to protect plants from summer heat and winter cold.
- Cut back the more evergreen herbs such as thyme by about half in early spring to remove any weaker or frost-damaged leaves to stimulate fresh, new growth. True perennials respond well to a late summer pruning— cut back herbs such as mint, oregano, and marjoram by one half to two-thirds in August, removing the weaker, heat-damaged growth. Lightly side-dressed with compost, cooler weather will usually bring on fresh, aromatic growth. Biennials such as dill, fennel, and parsley can be cut back in late summer to better extend them into their second and possibly third season.
- Fortunately, herbs rarely have many insect or disease problems. Early detection is key! Damage can be reduced if plants are carefully observed on a regular basis, such as when you water.
- An organic approach is effective, and recommended when growing herbs. Start with the mildest, least toxic approach and evaluate results. Allow some damage to be acceptable, especially when using herbs for wildlife habitat.
- If problems do arise, contact us for help, bringing clear photos, including some closer up and some further away, along with several samples in sealed bags of the damaged tissue or insect whenever possible.

See a Garden Advisor for additional help to be more successful growing herbs.

Compliments of North Haven Gardens • 7700 Northaven Rd, Dallas, TX 75230 • (214) 363-5316 • www.NHG.com