

Planting An Herb Garden

The popularity of herb gardens continues to grow each year. Some of the earliest texts referencing herbs date back to 2000 B.C. when herbs were used primarily for medicine. Today, in addition to medicinal uses, herbs are grown for food seasonings, fragrance enhancers, cosmetic products, and landscape beautification. Whether they are annuals or perennials, herbs can be grown easily with just a few helpful hints.

Herbs prefer well-drained, loamy to sandy soil and a moderate amount of fertilization. Most herbs prefer a pH in the range of 6.0 to 7.5. Having a soil test performed is recommended to ensure that your soil has the proper pH and nutrients in place (See OSU Fact Sheet [PSS-2207](#)). Adding organic matter to your soil, such as well-rotted manure or compost, is very beneficial and is especially important when planting perennial herbs, such as lavender, rosemary, and mint. Mulching your herb garden is also a good practice to conserve water and provide weed control. Landscape fabric covered with mulch can both help to control weed growth and slow the rapid spread of invasive herbs, such as mint. Planting these more aggressively spreading herbs in containers can also be beneficial.

Raised beds and container gardens are great options to consider for herbs if your soil beds are less than ideal. Most herbs prefer plenty of sunlight. For these plants, choose a location that receives at least six hours of sunlight each day. Herbs derive most of their flavors from fragrance oils, which are more prevalent in plants that have received plenty of sunlight. Proper spacing is also essential to ensure adequate room for continual growth.

Herbs can be grown indoors if given an appropriate amount of water and light. A south-facing window that provides at least six hours of light is a good option. Rotate each plant to ensure each side receives adequate light. Only water the herbs when they are dry since overwatering can increase the chance of disease. Water herbs thoroughly, and then allow the soil to dry before watering again. Watering is best done earlier in the day to ensure that the leaves dry out by nightfall.

Because herbs are often used in food preparation and/or medicinal purposes, pesticide use should be avoided. Additionally, when designing your landscape, do not plant herbs near plants that will potentially require pesticide use. Relying on cultural, biological, and physical control techniques for pest control with herbs is ideal. Ensure removal of weak or infested growth, regular pruning, adequate watering and spacing, and good drainage to help prevent pests and diseases. Occasionally, insecticidal soaps or horticultural oils can be useful with severe aphid, mite, or whitefly outbreaks. Often, just spraying your plants with water is adequate to wash away many pests. Larger pests, such as caterpillars and beetles, should be handpicked from the plants.

Herbs are best harvested in the morning after the dew dries but before the sun has dried the plant. Harvesting herbs just prior to blooming ensures that the essential oils are at their peak. Pinching back the tips of the herb plants encourages them to branch and become fuller. Herbs can be preserved by several techniques. Drying is the traditional method of preserving herbs. A warm, dry, dark, and well-ventilated area is ideal for drying herbs. Freezing is also a good method to preserve certain herbs, such as basil, that lose their flavor when dried. After quick rinsing and patting the leaves dry, remove the leaves from the stem, place in a labeled freezer bag, and store the herbs in the freezer.

There has been a recent resurgence of using herbs for medicinal purposes. Understanding the necessary safety precautions and limitations is essential when using herbs for this indication. Additionally, herbs continue to be widely used as a fragrance enhancer in potpourris and essential oil diffusers. Using herbs to enhance the landscape is becoming increasingly more popular. Herbs can be an attractive addition to perennial borders or in decorative planters. They can also serve as important nectar and pollen sources for pollinating insects and birds, including bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds. Some considerations to think about when planting herbs in your landscape include color, time of bloom, size, and growth habits.

With just a little planning and preparation, an herb garden can be a wonderful and rewarding addition. Whether to enhance the appearance of

your landscape or to be harvested for culinary or medicinal purposes, herbs can be a versatile and exciting component to almost any home garden.

References:

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